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STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS AND CONTENT OF THE PHENOMENON OF URBAN IDENTITY – SOCIAL AND TERRITORIAL COMPONENTS (ON EXAMPLE OF THE CITY OF ALMATY)

The study focuses on urban identity, examining its social and spatial components. The phenomenon is explored from cognitive, emotional, and behavioral perspectives. The study's uniqueness lies in its emphasis on two crucial aspects of the urban identity concept. First, it investigates this phenomenon's structure, framework, and common elements. This approach seeks to identify stable variables with the potential for replication in different territorial contexts – various cities.

Additionally, the second strand of the research focuses on the content of urban identity – its uniqueness, character, and distinctive features – using the example of a Central Asian city, Almaty. Thus, the study aims to generate material that provides insight into the city and the urban identity of its residents.

Such data can be useful for numerous applied urban fields, ranging from administrative and managerial decision-making to tactical and strategic planning in shaping cultural urban development policies. Having up-to-date data enables the correct formulation of urban development strategies. On the other hand, the scientific significance of the study lies in its aim to identify the universal framework and components of the phenomenon of urban identity.

Key words: urban identity, identity structure, Almaty, temporal perspective, social mapping, mental mapping, city perception.

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Қалалық сәйкестік феноменінің құрылымдық компоненттері мен мазмұны – әлеуметтік және кеңістіктік компоненттер (Алматы қаласының мысалында)

Бұл жұмыс қалалық сәйкестік тақырыбына, оның әлеуметтік және кеңістіктік құрамдас бөліктеріне арналған. Феномен когнитивті, сезімдік және мінез-құлықтық тұрғыдан қарастырылады. Зерттеудің бірегейлігі қалалық сәйкестіктің екі маңызды қырын зерттеуге бағытталуында. Біріншіден, ол құрылымын, қаңқасын және осы құбылысты құрайтын жалпы элементтерін қарастырады. Бұл тәсіл тұрақты айнымалыларды анықтауға ұмтылады, олар әртүрлі географиялық жағдайларда – әртүрлі қалаларда қайталануы мүмкін. Сонымен қатар, зерттеудің екінші бағыты қалалық сәйкестіктің мазмұнына, оның бірегейлігіне, сипатына және ерекшеліктеріне назар аударады. Орталық Азиядағы Алматы қаласы мысал ретінде алынып, оның тұрғындарының қалалық сәйкестігі зерттеледі.

Зерттеу барысында алынған деректер қаланы басқарудың қолданбалы салалары үшін маңызды болуы мүмкін. Олар әкімшілік, басқарушылық, тактикалық және стратегиялық шешімдер қабылдауда, сондай-ақ қалалық мәдени саясатты қалыптастыруда қолданылады. Өзекті мәліметтердің болуы қаланы дамытудың дұрыс стратегиясын қалыптастыруға мүмкіндік береді. Сонымен қатар, зерттеудің ғылыми маңыздылығы – қалалық сәйкестік феноменінің әмбебап құрылымдық қаңқасын және оның құрамдас бөліктерін анықтау.

Түйін сөздер: қалалық сәйкестік, сәйкестік құрылымы, Алматы, уақытша перспектива, әлеуметтік картография, менталды картография, қаланы қабылдау.

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Структурные элементы и содержание феномена городской идентичности – социальный и пространственный компоненты (на примере города Алматы)

Работа посвящена теме городской идентичности, ее социальному и пространственному компоненту. Феномен рассматривается с когнитивной, чувственной и поведенческой точек зрения. Уникальность работы в ее фокусе на двух важных гранях концепции городской идентичности. Ее структуре, каркасу, общим элементам из которых состоит данный феномен как таковой. Это попытка обращения к устойчивым переменным, с потенциалом реплицированы в различных территориальных условиях – городах. Кроме того, вторая нить исследования фокусируется на содержании городской идентичности ее уникальности, характере, особенностях, на примере города Центральной Азии – Алматы.

Таким образом исследование стремится получить материал, дающий представление о конкретном городе, городской идентичности его горожан. Такими данными могут воспользоваться многочисленные прикладные сферы городской детальности от административных, управленческих, от тактических, до стратегических, формирующих культурную политику городского развития. Имея актуальные данные, можно корректно формировать городское развитие. С другой стороны, научная значимость исследования в том, что оно ставит перед собой задачу выявления универсального каркаса, компонентов феномена городской идентичности.

Ключевые слова: городская идентичность, структура идентичности, Алматы, временная перспектива, социальное картирование, ментальное картирование, восприятие города.

Introduction

The increasing integration of Central Asian cities into the global context through various spheres of the economy, culture, and politics, such as tourism, the creative sector, and migration, makes it necessary to reflect on the phenomenon of urban identity, both regionally and independently for each city. Despite the active development of fields such as urban studies, sociology, urban anthropology, as well as political science and ethnography within the scientific institutions of Central Asia, the aspect of urban identity has been little studied and developed both theoretically and practically. The applied body of work largely focuses on issues of national and ethnic identity, while regional and local territorial aspects of identity are less explored. Nevertheless, there is a significant body of conceptual, theoretical, and practical work that has been developed by the international scientific community, awaiting its understanding, testing, and comparison at the local level, applicable to the cities of Central Asia.

In contemporary scientific discourse, there is a clear need for the development of a structural model of urban identity. This is due, on the one hand, to the existence of an extensive theoretical body mainly concentrated on substantive and unique aspects of

identity, and, on the other hand, to the insufficient elaboration of middle-level concepts capable of integrating both empirical and structural components of the phenomenon. The need to construct identity is a fundamental characteristic of human nature. At the same time, the territorial rootedness of social communities, as well as the designation of the city as one of the key measurable spatial units, emphasizes the necessity for systematic updating and justified analysis of data on urban identity.

In this context, the collection and interpretation of empirical data reflecting the specificity of the urban identity of residents of Almaty appears to be an important step towards forming strategies for sustainable sociocultural development of the urban community and enhancing its self-awareness in the context of dynamic transformations of the urban environment. The significance of the phenomenon of urban identity is confirmed by the results of empirical studies conducted by several researchers dedicated to various forms of social identification. According to data obtained during three measurements performed in 2014, 2017, and 2022, as well as an additional measurement among the urban population in 2023, urban identity consistently ranks among the top three directions of social self-identification. Thus, according to the 2023 study, 71% of urban respondents noted the importance of urban

identity, indicating its stable priority position within the structure of social identities (Ileuova, 2023).

The purpose of this study is to fix the current state of urban identity through the analysis of perceptions and behavioral practices of residents of the city of Almaty. Special attention is given to identifying key universal structural elements that form the framework of urban identity by analyzing the phenomenological content of residents' narratives and their interaction with urban space. The subject of this study is the urban community of Almaty residents. The object of the study is the structure and substantive filling of the phenomenon of urban identity. In accordance with the tasks set, the research focuses on two interrelated aspects: the identity of the residents themselves and the identity of the city of Almaty as a sociocultural space. The analysis is directed at revealing the structural elements and content of identity through cognitive attitudes and behavioral manifestations considered in the context of social identity.

Particular emphasis is placed on the connection of urban identity with territorial rootedness and the concept of "Third places" – public spaces where the social fabric of the city is formed. Such spaces serve both as arenas for the manifestation and as zones for the study of urban identity, playing a key role in the reproduction and transformation of sociocultural patterns of urban life.

Literature review

The concept of urban identity in this study is examined from two perspectives: social and territorial. It considers both the ways in which residents identify with the city – their perceptions and behaviors in the urban environment – and the specific locations within the city that provide necessary territorial anchoring. These locations serve as focal points that reveal the broader phenomenon of urban identity in concrete terms. In accordance with these objectives, a body of works, theories, and conceptual frameworks has been selected for analysis.

In his works, David Harvey raises the issue of blending social and geographical imagination in urban studies, highlighting a dichotomy that has developed over the past century in social and spatial research. On the one hand, there is spatial determinism; on the other, a complete focus on social factors, often to the exclusion of topos from consideration. He proposes that "the city should be viewed as a complex dynamic system in which spatial form and social processes are in constant interaction" (Harvey, 2018).

Furthermore, Harvey, following Henri Lefebvre, discusses the ongoing struggle in urban identity formation between local connections and global economic and political changes. He elaborates on this issue in *The Right to the City* (Harvey, 2019).

Material heritage and the places that residents choose for their leisure time also express the cultural trajectory of urban development. Museums, parks, shopping malls, cinemas, and theaters -the distribution of priorities among these spaces depends not only on the current preferences of the urban community but also on the urban environment itself. As Oldenburg (2014) states, "we can interpret cultural evolution within the urban system partly as a process of reorganizing the physical and social stimuli embedded within it." Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the cultural aspects of urban identity is possible only by maintaining a dual focus on both social and spatial dimensions.

This study emphasizes places where the urban community interacts -spaces chosen by residents during their free time outside of work and home. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg dedicated his research to urban culture, the interrelation of spatial and social processes, and the functioning of urban communities. He introduced the term third place to describe a specific category of public spaces distinct from home (the first place) and work (the second place). In a broad sense, third places include public urban spaces of various kinds – squares, parks, and plazas, as well as cafés, coworking spaces, and anti-café. According to Oldenburg, third places function as "equalizers" because they diminish social, economic, and status differences. In these spaces, urban residents temporarily "shed" their everyday roles-professional, familial, and hierarchical and engage in more horizontal, open forms of interaction. Here, urban identity is especially pronounced, based not on belonging to a particular social group, but on shared territorial and cultural experiences. Thus, third places counteract the growing fragmentation and selectivity of social ties, contributing to the formation of an inclusive urban community open to diverse forms of self-expression and equitable dialogue (Oldenburg, 2014).

Sociologist Richard Sennett focused on the relationship between the urban environment, people's behavior, and their identity. He argues that cities need to "plan for disorder" (Sendro, 2022). Without diversity, a city becomes "brittle." Sennett explored urban identity and how urban life influences it, stating that "the experience of living in a city – its complexity and uncertainty – is a necessary element for developing an adult identity that prepares individu-

als to encounter differences” (Ibid., p. 74). Additionally, he touched on the theme of the social fabric of time within the material urban space. Growth in the urban environment “requires dialogue between the past and the future; it is, rather, a matter of evolution” (Sendro, 2022).

Philip Zimbardo researched the concept of temporal perspective in individuals. Through numerous studies, he concluded that a high-quality, well-balanced temporal perspective is characterized by a positive attitude toward the past, the ability to construct an optimistic vision of the future, and a favorable assessment of the present. This also applies to an individual’s relationship with the city, which is shaped through temporal perspectives. A balanced time orientation is described as “an idealized mental structure that enables individuals to flexibly shift temporal frames between past, future, and present depending on the demands of a situation, resource assessment, or personal and social evaluations” (Zimbardo, 1999).

Marco Lalli systematized various theoretical traditions and views on place identity and territorial identity. His work contributed to the conceptualization of urban identity and place identity through a socio-psychological approach linked to self-esteem. Lalli proposed an applied measurement tool for studying urban identity – the City Identification Scale. This scale includes five key components related to the “I and the city” relationship: external value, general attachment, connection to the past, perception of proximity, and goal setting (Lalli, 1992).

In this study, an attempt is made to encompass three interrelated levels of urban identity among residents. These include:

- The cognitive level, which pertains to perceptions and representations of the city.
- The behavioral level, which reflects urban residents’ practices and activities.
- The affective level, which includes emotional relationships and sensory experiences associated with urban space.

The methodological foundation of this approach is based on a generalized body of scientific research dedicated to attitudes as complex psychosocial formations. As early as the classical works of the first urban sociologists, W. Thomas and F. Znaniecki, such complexes were defined through the concepts of social attitudes and social values (Thomas, 1918). In their interpretation, a social attitude represents a subjective psychological state through which an individual experiences the significance, value, and

meaning of a social object. It reflects an individual’s conscious relation to certain elements of social reality and serves as a basis for interpreting and interacting with the urban environment.

Thus, analyzing urban identity through cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions allows for a deeper exploration of the mechanisms that establish stable connections between city dwellers and urban space. To grasp the true essence of urban identity, it is essential to focus not only on how residents express it but also on how they enact it through actions. These actions can be categorized into everyday, unconscious behaviors that hold no particular significance for the individual, and deliberate acts, including collective actions that contribute to shaping the shared urban “field.”

According to Kurt Lewin, external environmental forces within the field influence an individual’s behavior. He describes the interaction between an individual’s internal sphere and the external field as the perceptual-motor layer (Lewin, 2000). When discussing the city, it can undeniably be considered an external field that affects individuals, plays a role in shaping urban identity, and is collectively created by its residents. As Lewin explains, “the properties of an individual’s ‘life space’ partially depend on the individual’s condition as a product of their history and partially on non-psychological factors – the physical and social environment.”

The search for a Kazakhstani identity begins with questions related to urban identity in Kazakhstan, which, in turn, stem from the historical study of urban everyday life. In this regard, examining urban history through the lens of economic, demographic, and social developments becomes particularly important (Saktaganova et al., 2017).

The relationship between urban and national identity is highlighted by G. Ileuova, the head of the Presidential Center for Social and Political Research Strategy. According to data from 2014, 74.5% of Kazakhstani citizens believed that their places of residence were characterized by peaceful and friendly relations among representatives of different ethnic groups. When asked, “How do people of your nationality feel in Kazakhstan today?”, 70.8% of respondents answered, “as full-fledged citizens of Kazakhstan.”

However, a shift in identity structure has been observed. While civic identity was consistently the dominant form of self-identification in 2004 and 2009, by 2014, priorities had changed. 75.7% of survey participants primarily identified themselves as residents of their city or village, and one of the most

common forms of self-identification became “a representative of my region.” These changes indicate the growing importance of local identity, which, in modern conditions, has become one of the most sought-after forms of social self-determination. This form of identity is increasingly based on everyday experience, territorial rootedness, and a sense of belonging to the local community (Vlast, 2014).

Local Identity

The article “City Identity: Almaty with a Slope” examines the phenomenon of Almaty’s urban identity through the lens of architectural, cultural, and social transformations. Urbanist Murunov emphasizes that urban identity is shaped not only by historical heritage but also by contemporary changes in the urban environment. Special attention is given to the visual aspects of the city, which influence the perceptions of both residents and tourists. The article also analyzes challenges related to modernization and globalization, which may lead to the loss of unique urban identity. The study highlights the necessity of preserving the local cultural code in the process of urban infrastructure development (Murunov, 2018).

In the search for social identity in certain districts of Almaty, research has been conducted by the Urban Forum Almaty (Kazakhstan) under the project “Social Identity of Non-Central Districts of Almaty.” The nature of social identity directly impacts the vitality of local communities (community vitality). This is a relatively new concept, closely linked to resilience – a community’s ability to recover from internal or external crises and continue to develop despite limited resources or other challenges while preserving its identity. Indicators of community vitality include not only education and healthcare levels, public and environmental safety, and quality of governance but also mutual assistance practices, trust among community members, and their involvement in decision-making (Social’naya identichnost’ necentral’nyh rajonov goroda Almaty, 2016).

The study of urban identity is of interest not only to anthropologists but also to urban planners. For example, in 2018 and 2021, Urban Forum Kazakhstan conducted research titled “Practices of Studying Identity: The Case of Atyrau.” The results demonstrated that there are no universal methods for studying identity, as approaches must be adapted to the specific context of each city (Nurmakov, 2021).

The spatial aspects of urban identity have been explored by Blagovidova N.G. and Ivanova O.A., who examine the semantic aspects of identity for-

mation in the architectural and spatial environment of newly established capital cities, including Astana. Based on their analysis, they developed the first matrix-table of characteristic features of the architectural and spatial environment of capital cities at various levels (Blagovidova, 2024).

Materials and methods

In line with the research goals and objectives, a qualitative research approach was chosen. Qualitative research aims to study and understand the meaning that individuals or groups assign to a social or human issue. This approach was selected because it “supports an inductive style, focuses on individual meaning, and reflects the complexity of a situation” (Creswell et al., 2023). Several methods were chosen to effectively provide insights into three key dimensions: perception, behavior, and the emotional sphere.

Interviews

Interviews help explore both perceptions and the emotional-sensory sphere through narratives.

- Sample characteristics: The study involved 70 semi-structured interviews with respondents aged 18 to 70. The interviews were conducted in Russian and Kazakh.

- Selection criteria: Participants had to have lived in Almaty for at least two years. The study was geographically limited to Almaty.

- Research timeline: Fieldwork was conducted in two periods—October–November 2023 and May–June 2024.

The semi-structured interview format was chosen to obtain rich, high-quality data on the values and identity perceptions of city residents. Unlike structured interviews or quantitative surveys, this method allows for open-ended responses, capturing unique narratives while maintaining flexibility. The logic of informants’ statements was prioritized, ensuring an in-depth analysis of urban identity.

Social Mapping

The second method used in the study was social mapping, implemented through a participatory, community-based approach. The methodological foundation was based on mental mapping techniques developed by Kevin Lynch and Stanley Milgram.

- Research location: Almaty

- Research period: December 2023 – February 2024

- Sample type: Spontaneous sampling

- Sample size: 200 respondents

Social mapping serves both as a research procedure and a means of visually representing data. This method is widely used in urban studies, including urban sociology, social geography, and urban anthropology. The Chicago School of Sociology was among the first to use mapping techniques to study urban environments. With advancements in GIS technologies, mapping has become an essential tool for analyzing spatial-social relationships.

Mental mapping—a concept tested and described by Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City*—focuses on how people perceive their urban surroundings, how they relate to the physical city, and how their mental images differ from actual maps. Lynch's key heuristic thesis suggests that a city's physical reality, its representation on maps, and the way people experience it are distinct phenomena (Nugayeva, 2024). The goal of mental mapping is to “awaken one's images of the material environment” (Lynch, 1982).

Community-Based Observations

A community-based approach (CBPR – Community-Based Participatory Research) was also integrated into the study. This innovative methodology in social research (Minkler, 2011) is a conceptual framework for data collection and research organization.

- CBPR begins with a question relevant to the community and actively engages community members and stakeholders throughout the research process.

- The method culminates in education and social change initiatives, making it both a research tool and a social intervention.

Additionally, the study was structured according to participatory research principles, where participants were not just data sources but active agents in the research process. This coresearch approach involved:

1. Joint problem formulation and discussion
2. Reflection on collected data
3. Participation in interpreting results and formulating conclusions

This methodological strategy aligns with critical and emancipatory paradigms, particularly Henri Lefebvre's “*Right to the City*” concept, later expanded by David Harvey. In this context, citizen participation in research is not only a democratization of knowledge but also an empowerment tool, allowing residents to take an active role in shaping and rethinking urban spaces as social environments.

Results and discussion

In the process of analyzing narratives of informants obtained through semi-structured interviews, the main focus was on identifying the structure of urban identity reflected through the individual and collective perception of citizens. To process and interpret the empirical material, thematic analysis was applied, allowing to the identification key meaning categories, stable patterns, and structural elements that shape the content of urban identity in the context of the daily experience of respondents.

Thus, in free form telling about the city, about their personal memories related to it, experiences, experiences, themselves and the urban community the study participants most often addressed the following big categories: problems, symbols, landscape/ nature/ architecture, myths/legends, people/ community/heroes, toponymy.

Based on this data, it can be concluded that these are the main structural elements that citizens understand, from which the perceived content of urban identity is constructed.

Landscape, architecture and natural environment as an element of identity

Landscape category consists mainly of: architecture, segments related to nature, infrastructure: “the city is like a carpet, lying at the foot of mountains, cozy paradise, trees, mountains, clean water, culture», mountain rivers, mountains themselves, hotel Kazakhstan, tree karagacha, sloping streets” (Informant 1, female, 43 years old).

Urban environment issues: ecology, transportation, and behavior culture

The problems are related to the environment, mainly air pollution, transport problems – traffic jams, public transportation, people, their culture of behavior in the city: “bad ecology, transport problems, homeless animals”; Victor Tcha is Almaty, if the song – changes, Our hearts demand. Public transport problems. Garbage. Lighting, Air. And here..., change is very much desired”; “the old grandfather with outdated traditions is an association of the whole city”; “You imagine, we live voluntarily in a city that reduces our life. Which kills us”. (Informant 8, female, 30 years old).

Community, citizens, and heroes as bearers of meaning

Community, citizens, heroes – here informants describe both locally known people and significant memories associated with them, as well as heroes

who contributed to the development of the city, and unconscious name-markers of space, mainly it is monuments, repainting wearing the name, the establishments with the names of prominent figures. Also, in general, the description and characteristics of a city-dweller – Almaty, its features, those traits that distinguish it from other cities: “city is – youth, modernity, creativity, European style, freedom, freedom and relaxation, perhaps. Because I often go and observe that people are so often relaxed, enjoy life”; “the city center is a crowd of people in a positive way”; “Almaty – it’s active citizens, it’s aryki, it’s Turencur and it’s fountains” (*Informant 4, female, 44 years old*).

City symbols: from the Apple to the Snow Leopard

Symbols – in this category are the key significant units, embodying multiple meanings, layers of culture. They are like material objects. Invisible symbols. The information about them is passed from word to mouth. Some of them are maintained at the official level and broadcast by the city administration, some are promoted and popularized by business marketing tools, and some are bottom-up symbols, informal, community-specific and sometimes urban conflict.

“For me, Almaty is nature and mountains, apple”; “a few words that I associate with the city of Almaty. First – “apple”. The second – “Alma” (which means “apple” in Kazakh); “City is – red apples, coat of arms of Almaty, snow leopard”; “Apple or apples, Aport also seems to me, mountains, students, smog” (*Informant 2, male, 37 years old*).

Myths/legends – expressed in the speeches of informants describe the origin of certain names, districts, communities of the city, citizens themselves. In the speech of informants this topic often intersects with toponymy.

Stories, bikes and legends are connected with the name of the streets and the bilingual context of life of the city community of Almaty – Kazakh and Russian languages, which provokes a difference in perception of words and sounds. And also not knowledge of the context and historical connection of some phenomena, names, events, personalities.

In addition, the names of the streets in the city have experienced 3 major waves of renaming over the last century. The first names were assigned and marked on the general plans in 1858. The next big wave of renaming was throughout the Soviet period, starting in 1917. The last stage can be called

the period when Kazakhstan became a sovereign state. The final mass renaming was marked in 2018, when Mayor of Almaty Bauyrjan Baibek ordered to rename 180 streets (*Karavan, 2018*)

The opinion of one of the informants: “People thought it was Rosa Bakieva. I mean, they thought it was a woman. Rosa, this is funny, not Rozybakiev*“, another informant’s judgment on the origin of the name of the same street: “It is Rozybakieva, it is a woman, many people believe that it is a male name, although it is a woman” (*Informant 3, male, 60 years old*).

Also a characteristic review in connection with the renaming of streets: “People often now confuse Kabanbai batyr, Bogenbay batyr or Aiteke bi, Kazybek bi. That is, exactly where there was a confusion (Soviet-October) nomastic process continued from this mess” (*Informant 7, female, 55 years old*).

Toponymy and quantitative analysis of references

The main toponyms mentioned by informants can be thematically combined into urbononyms, which in turn are represented by three categories: rodonomous (names of streets) – 32 references, chorionyms, agononyms (buildings, places) – 48 references, “top/bottom” (sides of the light) – 20 references in 70 analyzed materials.

Analysis of the data obtained during the interview, quantitative content analysis was carried out on the frequency of references highlighted by thematic analysis of key categories of toponyms. They are presented in the diagram below (Figure 1).

We can see that based on analysis of 70 units of text, the most popular in terms of quantitative category: nature – 23 mentions, citizens, community – 11 mentions, problems – 11 mentions, apples/ Aport – 8 mentions, mountains – 7 mentions, architecture – 7 mentions, City atmosphere, “spirit” – 7 references.

“Cozy paradise, trees, mountains, clean water, culture. But poor ecology, transportation problems, homeless animals” (*Informant 4, female, 44 years old*).

Less attention in the speech of informants are covered, but marked: food/ kitchen, features of the city planning, freedom, climate, trade activity, the city as a business center.

“Despite the proximity of the mountains, the atmosphere of a modern center where more business people, youth. Active such a center” (*Informant 3, male, 60 years old*).

Below is a diagram showing the proportions of the references to categories (Figure 2).

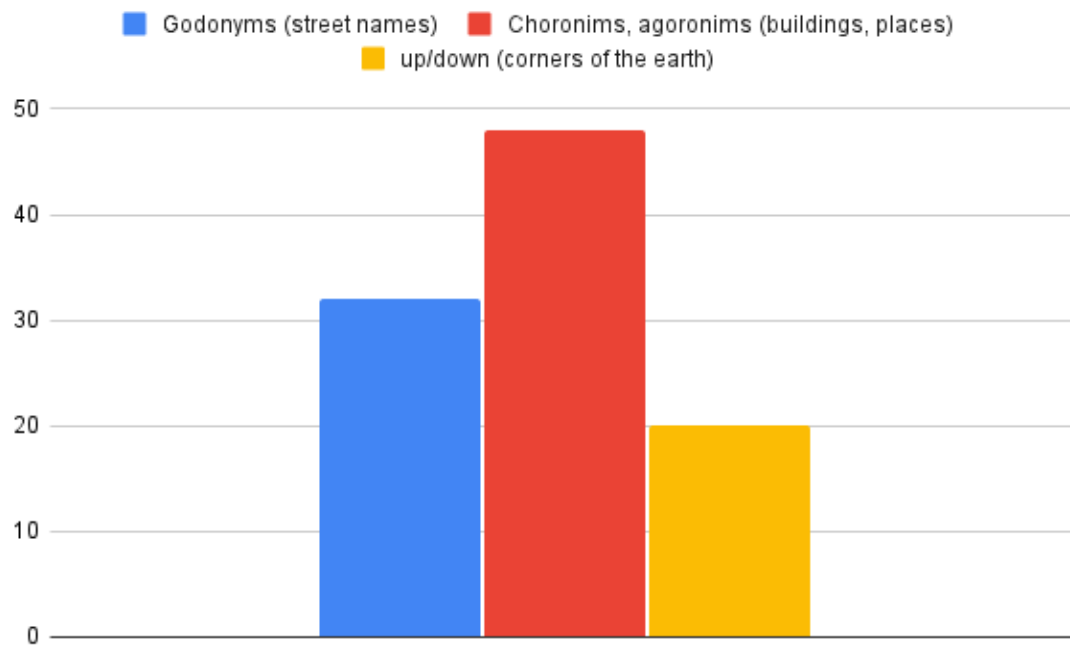


Figure 1 – Toponyms

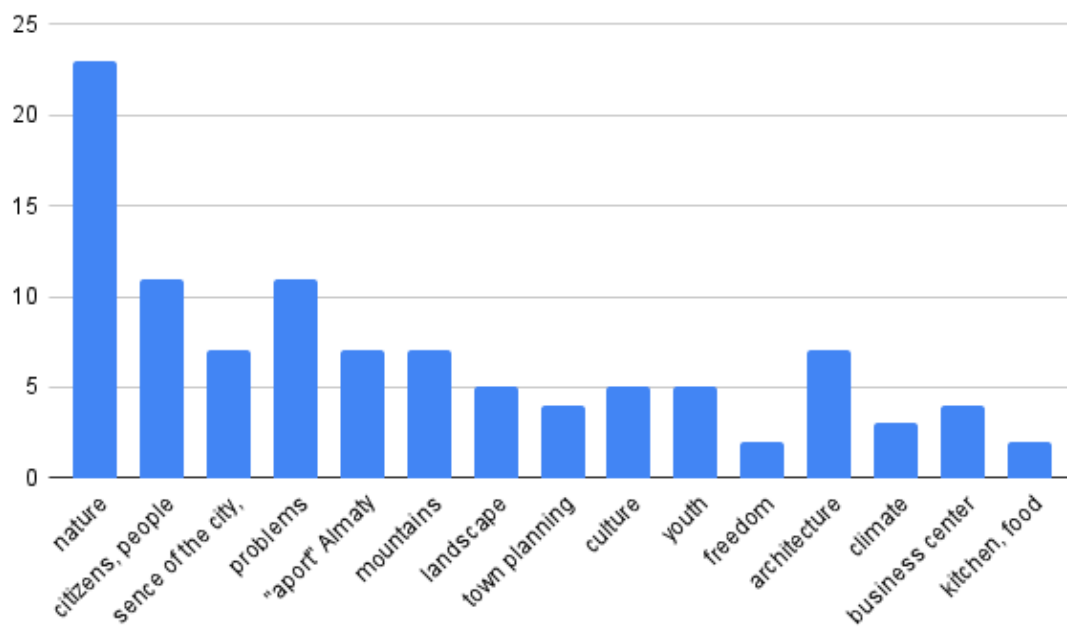


Figure 2 – Content of the city identity, representations of residents of Almaty

Another important variable in the formation of an urban identity is the connection of the resident with the city over time. According to the concept discussed above (Zimbardo, Philip & Boyd, John. (1999) The acceptance of the past and the ability to predict a positive vector of connection with the place in the future characterizes the quality of formation of identity. In the general theory of social identity development it can be both positive and negative, an individual can be satisfied with his “in-group”, or aspire to “out-group”, in this case with urban identity of a in-group serves the city of Almaty. An out-of-group, some other.

In the group of informants we study, with criticism of the current state of cities, and adding to the key associations associated with it negative, problematic associations related to air pollution issues and a number of other environmental problems, The general positive vector of attitude towards Almaty remained.

Psychological attachment to the city and the temporal dimension of identity

The positive emotionally coloured memories of the past, as well as the hopes full of purpose and dreams about the future of the city prevail. None of the informants said that they want to leave, or that living in the city gives them considerable discomfort.

“Now the square of my childhood slightly changed, but kept in general usual appearance, left giant stones with human growth, but added a monument to Makataev, poet” (*Informant 1, female, 43 years old*).

At the end of this discussing part obtained during the interview, authors want to return to the key concepts in the theory of “social identity”, based on the developments of G. Tajfela and J. Turner, which in turn were based on the work of E. Erickson, mainly on “Identity: youth and crisis” (*Nugayeva, 2024*) The author singled out a segment dedicated to the territory in all its diversity, including “urban identity”. In their works, the authors elaborate on the topic of social identity, and urban identity is one of the categories that make up the social identity of each individual. The methods of constructing identity can vary in directions: from the common, from the different and from the identical/ itself identical.

Comparison of “us” and “them”: self-identification of Almaty residents

Based on this research, we can conclude that the identity of Almaty is more based on self-identity. That is, in recognition of their uniqueness, reliance on themselves, understanding their differences, characteristics. In the material received only three

episodes where the city and its inhabitants are compared with others, that is, the process of identification is built through a common or an opposed to significant other. In this case, another city or residents of other cities.

“When you live in a small city and say that you are going to Moscow, everyone asks you to bring something or buy. But when I said that I was going to Moscow, the people of Almaty simply said: “So what? We have our own capital, we don’t need anything”. It was an interesting contrast” (*Informant 5, male, 65 years old*).

Participatory mapping: perception of urban spaces

The process for this phase of research and data collection was as follows. Townspeople were asked to go into the city and define for themselves places in three categories. Places attractive, cozy, reserving, where good yourself or with a close person, conditional “place for kissing”. Places are repulsive, unpleasant. Causing a sense of anxiety, insecurity “crime scenes”. The third category is “third places,” where citizens are comfortable to spend time outside of home and all jobs, where they find leisure and socialization, which they can recommend to others. An important part of the study is that participants should not share their opinions about such places, ie provide information from memory based on experience, but actually go to the city, take a photo of this place (Figure 3) Indicate the geographic data and describe why they consider the place to belong to one category or another. Thus, in contrast to the group of social or mental mapping methods based on the cognitive sphere of the respondents, it was important for us to connect the behavioral, behavioral component and the real experience of living places in the city.

Discussion of the results of social participatory mapping can begin with the quantitative relationships of three categories of places proposed in the joint study to citizens: places dangerous, unpleasant; places secluded, loved; places for socialization and leisure.

Thus, in the first place in number of references are “third places” – 63 , “favorite places” – 39 , and “dangerous places” – 24. In this ratio we see a greater interest of citizens, shown to the category of third places, they were more willing to share, described, photographed, also their typology within the category is most diverse. The description and characterization of places in selected categories was developed together with informants, based on their experience in each of the chosen places.



Figure 3 – A photo of the mapping process by citizens

“Third places” as the core of social life

So, “third places” according to the people participating in the study is a cafe, park, university, creative hub, TRC. The names listed above are the most frequent ones that were shown in the photo, described and mapped. It is important to note that the university by R. Oldenburg categorization refers to the second places, ie work and study, but in this study students and teachers shared third places within the university – recreation rooms, cafeterias, winter gardens, Libraries etc. The range of places in category “third place” is the largest, also marked by single mentions – skating rink; co-working; sports club; courtyard at JK; winter garden (on school grounds); gallery; theater; knitting club. In addition, there is a mention of the bathhouse and mosque, viewing platform in the mountains and mountain spring, which is defined as reflecting the unique part of urban culture, leisure and identity of Almaty.

In explaining the choice of “third places” the participants used the following wording, giving a general description of this category of places: “come in my free time”, “place to meet with friends and relatives”, “place where I feel good” (*Informant 9, male, 20 years old*).

Intimate, cozy, and memorable locations (“Kissing Places”)

The most popular “Kissing places” or secret spots in the study are represented by the following

choices of informants: square, pedestrian boulevard, café, school, TRC, and arches in courtyards. In addition, the study participants included a flower shop, a yard, a train station, a business center, and a salon.

Formulating the characteristic “places of kisses» informants resorted to the following descriptions: “where I am well with a loved one”, “place beautiful, for date”, “place secluded”, “place where comfortable, cozy and smells good”, “place of my dates and kisses”, “intimate place” (*Informant 1, female, 43 years old*).

Dangerous and disturbing places in the perception of city residents

The most common danger areas were intersections, passages between houses, and spaces deep in parks. Also mentioned were deserts, spaces behind the school and a real crime scene.

The most common danger areas were intersections, passageways between houses, spaces deep in parks. Also mentioned were deserts, spaces behind the school and a real crime scene.

The overall characteristics of dangerous places according to the study participants are: “dark”, “deserted”, “crowded”, “dirty”, “repellent”, “safe for men but not for women” (*Informant 10, female, 2 years old*).

Detailed quantification of all three categories of seats is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Name and number of third, dangerous and secret places in Almaty

Third places		Dangerous places (crimes)		Kissing places (secret)	
Name	Number	Name	Number	Name	Number
Cafe	12	Parking	3	Promenade	3
Parks	5	transport interchange	4	Park bench	3
Bazaar	2	Between-home passages	7	Business Center	1
University	7	Deep Park	4	Salon	1
Skate Park	1	Wasteland	3	Park	5
Banya «Arasan»	2	Place «behind the school»	2	School	3
Mountain Source «Gorelnik»	3	Actual crime place	1	Cafe	5
Museum	1			Flower shop	1
Vintage shop	2			Brawler	1
Eco-shop	2			Shopping mall	3
Boulevard	2			Square	4
Shopping Center	5			Station	1
religious institution (mosque)	1			Arches in «stalinka»	3
Riverside	3			Viewing area in the mountains	2
Concert hall	1			Boulevard (pedestrian street)	3
Creative hub	5				
Skating	1				
Coworking	1				
Sports club	1				
residential complex	1				
Winter garden (on the school grounds)	1				
Gallery	1				
Theatre	1				
Knitting Club	1				
total:	63		24		39

The application of places proposed by citizens on a map, allows us to understand geographical, territorial data, namely clustering, the pattern of placement of certain categories of places. So in figure 4 we see that the third places, clustered predominantly on the north-eastern part of the city, which corresponds

to the historical center of Almaty formed from 30 to 70 years XX century. There are also many other places. Dangerous, unsafe places – they're all over the map, moving west – these are the new parts of the city that were formed by waves in the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, the most extreme points.

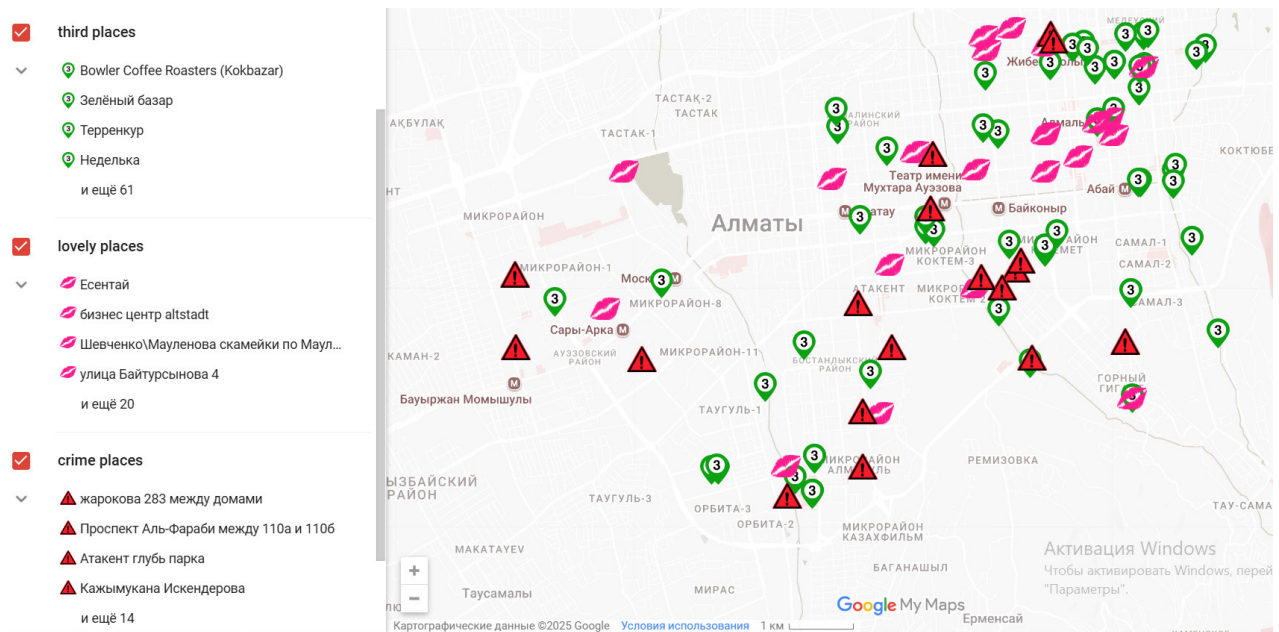


Figure 4 – Map of third, dangerous and lovely places in Almaty

Conclusion

Analysis of the urban identity of residents of Almaty in the framework of this study was carried out using qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and social mapping, implemented in a participatory, community-based approach. This methodological choice made it possible to record current manifestations of urban identity through the prism of individual perception, behavioral practices, and emotional relationship of citizens to urban space. The data obtained are of practical relevance and can be used to develop strategies for sustainable and inclusive urban development.

The study allowed to identification of both unique content features of the phenomenon of urban identity of Almaty, and its structural components that form a stable framework. The elements identified – symbols, problems, myths and legends, features of the landscape, architecture, toponymy, as well as important urban characters and communities – represent a set of basing points on which identity is based. These structural components are comparable and can be used in similar studies in other urban contexts.

Among the characteristic phenomena established during the work, special importance is given to the symbol of the apple, which is perceived by citizens as a symbolic element of local identity.

Urban fiction is often built around the names of streets, which are interpreted through their rhythmic or sonic perception, as well as through historical layers and transformations of the same space in different periods of time. The problems persistently present in the daily life of citizens play an essential role in the formation of identity, in particular issues of ecology, air pollution, state of transport and road infrastructure.

The behavioral aspect of urban identity was investigated through an analysis of space development practices and relations to different urban locations. Three types of places were recorded as part of the participatory mapping: third places (socialization and leisure spaces), secluded, intimate areas intended for individual stay or communication with a close person, and also places that have negative emotional coloring – perceived as unsafe, repulsive. Third places, including cafes, parks, university spaces, shopping centers, and creative Hubs, were the most popular among citizens. In the category of private, “secluded” places were marked squares, individual benches, embankments, and chamber areas in parks. Among the spaces with negative color-intersections, passages between houses, and poorly lit areas in the depths of green plantations.

Thus, the results obtained allow us to speak of a multilayered and multi-level structure of ur-

ban identity based on a combination of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional components. The study demonstrates the importance of local experience and territorial rootedness in the formation of urban identity and highlights the importance of working with spatial practices in the study of social dynamics of the urban environment.

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