

Creative Wealth in the Middle of Nowhere. Karaganda's Struggle for Modernization

Kreativer Reichtum mitten im Nirgendwo.
Karagandas Modernisierungskampf

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Abstract

This paper offers the case study of the city of Karaganda, on conceptions and improvements in the field of creative cities policies in Kazakhstan and suggests some modalities for improved development. An incipient process in considering cultural policies for promoting more attractive and livable cities has emerged in Kazakhstan since its split from the Soviet Union, but its progress is one of non-integrated paths. This is due to the absence of civil society, low involvement of the business community in tourism growth, and strong dependence on the centralized government for funding. Although policy makers have previously worked on creative city design, a lack of coherence in implementation and a lack of unity in conveying meaning to urban developers, has stunted progress.

Die Stadt Karaganda wird in diesem Beitrag als exemplarischer Fall des in Kasachstan vorherrschenden Verständnisses und Umgangs mit kreativer Stadtentwicklung und Kulturpolitik analysiert. Zwar gab es in Kasachstan seit der Auflösung der Sowjetunion erste (kultur)politische Ansätze zur Erhöhung der Attraktivität, Bekanntheit und Lebensqualität einiger Städte, allerdings wurden diese bisher nicht zu einem allumfassenden Modernisierungsprozess zusammengeführt. Dies lässt sich dadurch erklären, dass weder die Zivilgesellschaft, noch genügend Unternehmen in das Wachstum des Tourismussektors eingebunden wurden und die Entscheidungen über Förderungen stark von einem zentralen Regierungsorgan abhängen. Obwohl die (kultur)politischen Akteure bereits Konzepte für kreative Städte erarbeitet haben, scheitert die Umsetzung an einer kohärenten Strategie und der Unfähigkeit, Inhalte an Stadtentwickler zu kommunizieren. Auf Basis der Ergebnisse der Fallstudie werden einige Instrumente und Modalitäten zur Verbesserung von Stadtentwicklungsprozessen vorgeschlagen.

Keywords

Creative City, Tourism, Social Change, Ideology, Authoritarian Political Regime
Kreativität, Tourismus, Stadt, sozialer Wandel, Ideologie, autoritäre Regierung

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1. Introduction

Although the concepts of creative and smart cities have occurred in the political ideology of Kazakhstan, beginning nearly three decades ago, only a few actions have been taken in regard to Karaganda city and its region.

Karagandans have experienced numerous cultural and economic struggles in their recent history that also impact the development of national identity. Some decades ago, the city of Karaganda was the second largest in the country and was considered to be a cultural capital. However, in past years, depopulation, migration, and industrialization have dimmed the interest of authorities in implementing projects in creative industries and international tourism. Thus, an incipient process in considering cultural management as a key modality to promoting a more attractive and livable city has started, but it is hesitantly following some different, non-integrated paths. Despite numerous foreign languages (Kazakh, Russian, Uzbek, Turkish, and many others), trade, and hospitality businesses, relatively small progress has been registered in stimulating cultural development and tourism branding, soft infrastructure development (healthcare and education as two examples), usage of English as an international language in services, and in the promotion of the city as an attractive and visible destination. This is due to a low involvement of the business community in cultural and tourism development and a strong dependence on the government, which has been funding the main projects in the field. Specific focus has also been on material culture rather than immaterial heritage. In short, policy makers have previously worked on creative city development, but due to a lack of coherence in policy conception and implementation, as well as lack of unity in conveying meaning to urban developers, progress has been stunted.

In this case study I argue that without acknowledging the importance of cultural policy development, not having acquired a good balance and harmonious combination of ancestry and modernity, and not using heritage and creative industries to proactively promote the region and the city as an international tourist destination, Karaganda has been unable to fully develop as a creative city. Instead, poor branding strategies have persisted, blurred, and ideologically shaped the city. Those in charge of administrating tourism show little commitment to implementing reforms in the field, business associations like consortia and networks

are almost nonexistent, and the entire ideologized process of economy development is supervised by only one political party, *Nur Otan* (Radiant Fatherland). The leadership model of former President Nazarbayev originally seemed to be distinct from other post-Soviet Central Asia countries, as it focused mostly on the adopted slogan ‘economy comes first.’ But the government has forgotten to instill development policies for the country with supportive cultural ingredients meant to contribute to economic transformation.

To illustrate the above, I begin by defining the cultural context of the city and region and review the literature in the field of creative and smart cities. My intent is to describe and analyze Karaganda from the standpoint of creative cities and cultural development. Further, I make some recommendations for using arts, geography, history, and heritage to promote the region to an international audience. Fundamental theories and government strategies of creative industries and smart cities’ development are incorporated with notes, collected in the field, over the last five years. In so doing, this paper offers reflections, from the standpoint of critique, on cultural policy, and suggests some modalities of development in the city and region of Karaganda in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the biggest country in Central Asia.

2. The Context of Creative City

Globalization is seen today as a cultural phenomenon that has appealed to many researchers, from historians to linguists, anthropologists, critical thinkers, and people interested in the history of ideas. Mostly comprehended as a “work of imagination” (ERIKSEN 2007: 23), globalization, in which media and migration play a great role, has confronted old and brought about new ideologies. At the same time, new global and local politics have emerged in the field of creative entrepreneurship and industries, and new government programs have been tailored to fit into the ideological and methodological plans of many nations’ development. Among them, the role of culture in anthropology (DELANEY 2004, SALZMAN 2001), branding countries (HANNERZ 2010), and tourism management (CAVES 2000) have been acknowledged in all advanced societies. It is not clear to what extent emerging countries, especially those fairly recently separated from former economical, ideological, and political alliances, have adopted these same plans. Specifically, as concerns this paper, this is the case of nations formerly under Soviet control.

Many nations have also had to deal with issues of change generated by budgetary allocations and the modalities in which governments grant cultural projects as well as through the globalization of cultural markets. In this context, tourism began integrating among its formulae of success numerous soft dimensions, like “transnational connections” (HANNERZ 1996: 9) with migration, gender distribution, and virtual communication through social media networks of importance.

The switch from cultural development to creative industry implies a process of cultural assimilation and policy definition, followed by strategic implementation. Creative industries (CAVES 2000) are quite a new concept claiming, “to capture significant new economy enterprise dynamics such as arts, media and cultural industry” (CUNNIGHAM 2002: 54). Meanwhile, creative industries are closely related to the movement from centralized and rigorously planned economies to market-oriented ones as well as to a subtle transition from traditional values – which may be identified in a country’s brand – to liberal values instead. Some seminal shifts occurred in the process of defining and implementing creative industries, which have become principles of contemporary policies manifested in a range of structural changes, “changing terms under which governments direct funding to the cultural sector; the globalization of cultural markets; competition for audience attraction, [...] and changing audience constitution and practices” (GIBSON 2001: 120). To make them successful, it is necessary to increase advertising, enhance branding strategies, and implement policies in an integrative and innovative manner. In doing so, encouraging individual imagination for creative entrepreneurship, and instilling the policies with culturally designed and imbued projects might become a fruitful resource of development.

Coming to the narrow field of branding, it includes “excellence and transparency as signals of a *neoliberal culture complex*, taking different shapes in different settings as it interacts with what was different in [a] place” (HANNERZ 2010: 5) and “implies building a public image and underlining cultural identity” (ibid, p. 46). The origin of the concept of creative city is well established (LANDRY/BIANCHINI 1995; CAVES 2000; LANDRY 2012) and has become a movement in rethinking the development, planning and management of cities, mostly about “how to make a city more livable and vital by harnessing people’s imagination and talent to creativity” (LANDRY 2012: 13) and using different categories of capital (cultural, financial, human) in creative city making as “an alternative to instrumental thinking” (LANDRY/BIANCHINI 1995: 17). The concept of creativity envisions methods of strategic urban plan-

ners requesting innovators to rethink the image of the city for improving the quality of residents' lives and making it more attractive to tourists. A combination of hard and soft infrastructure, including architecture, roads network, squares, but also cafes, parks, design and information communication, public wireless zones, performing arts and fashion venues, and cultural heritage are meant to improve public perceptions of the city. Discourse and its symbolic power (BOURDIEU 2000) to convey meaning through cognitive frames or scenes (CRAPANZANO 1986, 2000) and "metaphorical concepts" (LAKOFF/JOHNSON 1980: 29) play a significant role in building cultural ideologies.

3. Kazakhstan and Karaganda in Brief

Having been known as a country rich in minerals located at the crossroad of civilization, and experiencing the domination of various ethnicities and empires, Kazakhstan still remains a terra incognita for anthropologists and researchers in cultural studies. Some programmatic documents inked, in almost three decades of independence, by the first president of the country (NAZARBAYEV 1993, 2010a, b, c, 2015, 2017) mostly focused on agriculture, coal mining, metallurgy, and petrol extraction, but also considered human potential (NAZARBAYEV 2010 a: 59). They also projected long term strategies of development (KAZAKHSTAN 2030, 2050). However, the efforts for modernization – designed to shore up a long infrastructure network, meant to help with developing the economy and tourism, and to improve the image of the region through education, media, tourism, and international language usage – have remained at an incipient level. Culture-wise, the country is heterogeneous, as its landscapes have been traversed by not only different ethnicities and empires but also by peoples of diverse cultures and religions in a continuous process of adaptation and assimilation, consequently followed by replacements retracing ancient motifs and symbolic images into ethnic frames of Kazakh specificity (NAZARBAEV 2010b: 152-154). In recent decades, new and global phenomena comprising migration, industrialization and tourism development have affected the country through population composition and the process of building ethnicity based on imposing a national language, recovering and promoting heritage through folklore, history, and religion. In this "new era of independence" (NAZARBAYEV 2017), Kazakhstan has become a key nation in international politics by virtue of its geographical significance in Central

Asia. The role of Nazarbayev, as the national leader, has also helped to fix the uniqueness of the country on a political stage, mainly in the form of his influence both at home and abroad. Nonetheless, in the international arena, the country is still perceived as part of post-Soviet space little known in Europe and the Western world. According to some surveys on tourism, the country is regarded with a great sense of curiosity by tourists. In one study, 49% of interviewees showed an interest in visiting, while it is positively regarded by only 5% (OSPANOV 2013: 496). A quite ambiguous ideological construct has been defined in a seven-point plan, metaphorically coined under the name *The Country of the Great Steppe*. Included are some mingling concepts like culture, geography, history, economy, society, state, and international relations. They are, however, not very clearly reflected in policies and strategies.

If the aim of the national strategy is to increase agriculture, resource-saving, coal and raw oil extraction, industrialization (NAZARBAYEV 1993), and the “ideological consolidation of society as a condition of Kazakhstan progress in the transition from a planned to a market economy, from totalitarianism to liberal politics” (NAZARBAYEV 2010c: 22), then the Karaganda region was perceived as a miniature replica of Kazakhstan and has become a space for piloting various projects, including those relating to culture and tourism. Creative entrepreneurship, eco-awareness, mobile and skilled human resources adaptable to a global market, financial hubs, business to business services, heritage, design and infrastructure, media and entertainment, all work together in creating and conveying a positive image to any visitor of the city who can be amazed by a clean environment, convenient transportation, interesting customs and music, and design and scenery of landscapes and venues. Kazakhstan’s image was badly damaged in 2011, with release of the film *Borat*, which featured the grossly stereotyped fictional character of a Kazakhstan reporter who travels across the United States, offending many people along the way. A significant endeavor in reframing stereotypes and critiques into “positive national branding” (SHAKIROVA 2015: 1, 12) has since come about, with evident results from hosting international exhibitions (*EXPO-Future Energy* 2017), economic and political gatherings (*Eurasian Economic Forum* 2018), and sports events (*Winter University Competition* 2018), which are meant to promote the country as a tourist destination. Ambitious plans to raise the number of international tourists from as little as 65,000 per year in 2010 to 5 million in 2020 (OSPANOV 2013: 497), were designed and implemented in order to develop Kazakhstan’s soft infrastructure, to link the main cities by air,

train, and motorways, and to create a network of smart cities. However, some reverberations of “post-Soviet reframing of culture and society” (DAVIS/EROFEEV 2011: 710) have resonated in cultural management and social sciences development, mostly comprising centralized political power, state ideology consolidation, and government command over the entire economy.

4. Cultural, Ethnic and Political Contexts

The largest region of Kazakhstan, located in the middle of the steppe, has Karaganda as its capital city. Over several decades it has been increasing and decreasing in terms of population and cultural development. Recognized as the main coal basin of the country, the region has experienced industrialization, and has become the main base of cultural and creative industries and green energy development. Eighty-five years ago, the region was the destination of massive deportation from many parts of the Soviet world. More than twenty million people of different ethnicities were deported to the Karaganda region to imprisonment camps and forced labor places. Such displacements happened over the space of two decades. The main calculated effect of the prison camps was to decimate the intelligentsia in general, including artists, poets, musicians, and writers in particular. This exerted some impact on today’s creative industries in the region because after liberation, the ethnic composition of the population has changed significantly, and people who remained in the region were infused with or silenced as part of the communist ideology of repression, by 1990, and kept in the Soviet system. Soon after splitting from the Soviet Union, the population of the region decreased to less than a million in the entire region, half that which existed three decades ago.

Karaganda is an interesting Central Asia city case study to review, as it has become increasingly cosmopolitan despite cultural impediments, such as centralized control of the presidency and an ideologized system of power exerted by government, a lack of a cultural and intellectual marketplace where the professionals are encouraged to generate a wealth of ideas, and insufficient development of a civil society and liberal economy. So despite the fact that Karaganda is located in the heart of the country and less than 200 kilometers south from the capital city Nur-Sultan, the central government has not understood the need to constantly and equally invest in development programs in order to reduce

what are generally called cultural, economic, political, and social disparities. Nevertheless, local and regional authorities have allocated funds for projects without defining a specific strategy of development or involving all stakeholders in this cultural endeavor, which is still not adequately articulated or coherent. And although the arts are considered important and are expressed in political discourse and at the ideological level, the authorities have not yet succeeded in positioning them as modalities to attract tourists or to stimulate the economy. In addition, in terms of policies, the government and presidency have acknowledged the “melting pot” characteristic of the population in the region and the value of multiculturalism as a model over the last decade (NAZARBAYEV 2015, 2017). With a constant increase of Kazakh people among the Russian speaking population, the region remains famous for hosting more than 130 nationalities, among which the most numerous remain Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Korean, Germans, Greeks, Jews, Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians, and Uzbeks. Their cultures and religions were accepted, integrated in the frame of *Assembly of Peoples Living in Kazakhstan* (ALEXANDROV 2018: 9-12), and their costumes, dances, songs, and traditions are displayed in celebrations organized by authorities in the spring and fall seasons. However, beyond ideology, fresh thinking is needed to enhance community cohesion and to promote multi-ethnic and religious tolerance as signs of diversity and advantage for the city and region. At the same time, cosmopolitanism should be integrated into national branding strategies. To date there are only a few, limited efforts. For example, there is an illuminated billboard message, in Russian, overlooking the city’s main roadway saying “Karaganda is an exemplary city in terms of tidiness and high culture in Kazakhstan.” Other messages in English and Kazakh express similar kinds of local patriotism in a more global style, including “I love Karaganda!” along with a red heart made of big, illuminated letters of plastic, as a symbol of love for the home city. They are placed in the main squares, in front of a theater and the main stadium.

Even though in theory “cultural or soft power always matches economic, and political always matches economic power” (LANDRY 2012: 19), in the case of Karaganda, the cultural policies remain bureaucratic and ideologized. People appointed to implement them are suspected to be corrupt, paying less attention to creativity in tourism or involving international professionals in designing and implementing projects. There is, instead, centralized control of the economy that primarily emphasizes agriculture, extractive industries, and steel manufacturing instead of

cultural or creative industries. Consequently, a focus on industrialization, transfer of presidential ideology into unarticulated local policies, and centralized financial control exerted by the main granting authorities, are holding back the city and the region from advancement in the field of creative industries.

5. Cultural Policies and Creative Industries: Karaganda's Case

Some attempts at setting the terms of cultural policies can be noticed at the beginning of the current decade, when the main works of the first president (NAZARBAYEV 2010a, b, c, d) were translated into English, and some programmatic documents like *100 Concrete Steps to a State for Everyone* (NAZARBAYEV 2015) and the last book *The Era of Independence* (NAZARBAYEV 2017) established the ethnic and ideological directions of the country and the region's development. In narratives on a new Turkic ethnicity, namely a Kazakh nation, some ideas and political directions regarding creative cities and tourism clusters can be found in efforts to mythologize the past, for example emphasizing popular conceptions of Al-Farabi, a philosopher supposed to be born in South Kazakhstan, who lived in the 11th century and who is considered a spiritual parent of the Kazakhstanis – the Plato of Central Asia. The Kazakhstan government decided to erect a stone memorial in Damascus, Syria, to claim his 'Kazakh ethnicity.' Moreover, some schools and universities in the country have been using his name as a sign of cultural prestige and recognition. Numerous busts, pictures, and statues can be found in these educational establishments or in city main squares. Other aspects of historical mythologization are claiming Kazakh origins for Genghis Khan, who has been transformed into the ancestor of medieval rulers and founders of ethnic Kazakh tribes. Therefore, the Ulytau mountains have become, in recent times, 'the cradle of the nation,' and a cultural, ethnic, and touristic destination. A local echo of presidential ideology to recovering the immaterial heritage in the frame of ethnicity was marked by integrating the region into a sacral geography of the country, which combines some opportunities for ecological tourism. Therefore, the land has received a metaphorical name, *Saryarka* (Yellow Arch), and archaeological and historical places started being promoted, first in Kazakh and Russian languages, through a collection of professional articles issued by the homonymous Institute of Archaeology at Karaganda State University (Loman *et al.* 2012). At that time, the local airport, a movie theater, and

a shopping center borrowed the second name of the region for its cultural prestige in the area.

Karkaraly National Park has more than 30 archaeological sites, mostly burial mounds and ancient settlements within park boundaries. In the past few years, the History-Geographical Society, Avalon, has jointly, with the main tour operator, Nomad Travel Agency, designed and published brochures and maps of the main destination in the region, and less than 100 international tourists per year have visited these places. Although excavated as far back as 20-25 years ago, ancient archaeological sites in the region had never been promoted internationally until the beginning of this decade. Due to its proximity, a place like Kent village offers great potential for holding cultural and international travel groups, but due to the basic infrastructure of accommodation, consisting mainly of renovated rural dwellings and the lack of global promotion, inbound tourists are commonly locals or officials. After discovering a grave where an embraced couple was buried together with some cauldrons, jewelry, and horse skeletons “pulling a chariot after life” (STEWART 2018), further effort to internationalize and advertise to the world was made by translating an interview with famous local archaeologists and historians into English.

Architecture, road networks, parks, and squares play an important role in both the hard and soft infrastructure of Karaganda, thus enhancing the general image and underlining its specificity or uniqueness. Strolling in the alleys, avenues, and streets allows any visitor to discover a strata of recent history in aspects such as dwelling shapes, accommodation facilities, stores, and shopping centers or other markets, trade establishments, as well as cultural venues like dancing and disco clubs, museums, performing arts facilities, theaters, or leisure spaces, such as beauty parlors, or spa centers.

Roads infrastructure reflects another aspect of recent heritage and ideological development in the urban planning of Karaganda. Curved alleys among buildings, narrow muddy tracks, macadams, crooked asphalted highways, streets, large post-soviet avenues, and boulevards create a network which, through naming, express a strong sense of modern ideology. The primary avenue crossing the city from north to south is named for the national poet, Buhar Zhyrau; the second boulevard, known for decades as Peace, was last year renamed Nazarbayev Avenue. Some streets have the names of Kazakh or Russian artists, scientists, or writers (*Abay Kunanbayev, Amanzholov, Ermekov, Gogol, Mukanov, Seifulin, Popov, Tereshkova*), and quite recently one was named after

an academic institution (*University Street*). Three main parks located in the center, two remote neighborhoods, and another two belonging to universities complete the recreation spaces in the city. The biggest one remains Central Park, lying around a lake and combining pathways winding across the river banks with large stairways from the four cardinal points, leading visitors to the most attractive part in the north of the lake called “entertainment park,” which provides bicycles and tricycles, bungee jumping, carousels, horses, pony rides, and slides. Seasonal restaurants and bars are housed in improvised shelters and tents. Nautical surfing, hydro cycles, boats, and a small ship take tourists across and around the lake. The main open spaces of the city are called Independence, Republic, and Gagarin squares and have, in the center, monuments like Stela, a pillar with the Kazakhstan flag, and the first Russian astronaut shown in a space landscape.

Civil and industrial buildings, churches, clubs, houses and apartments, hotels and hostels, avenues and roads, lakes and fountains, parks, and squares make the city texture, from a bird’s eye view, look haphazard and randomly designed. Due to the collapse of underground coal mines located in the former city center, a new center was developed approximately forty years ago. Now the cityscape is similar to Saint Petersburg, covered by disparate neighborhoods located remotely from the center, combining the structure of satellite districts and villages with some 5 to 10 kilometers distance between them. Although some parts of the city retain rural dwellings grouped in *Finnish Village*, *Sortirovka*, *Uzinka* districts, and the supposed private sector, mixed up with blocks of apartments, the south-eastern district displays quite a unitary architecture although in socialistic style, and together with the northern quarter *Majkuduk* have served as a bedroom community for all major clerks, business people, and workers. Some layers of recent history are visible in the architecture, which combines establishments with “soviet-imprint” (MORISSON 2018: 43) like numerous two-story houses grouped on Lenin’s Street or Miners’ Neighborhood; they were built by Japanese residents soon after their liberation from Karaganda concentration camps. In addition, there are socialist blocks of apartments painted in either an already dirty white or a light blue similar to that of Kazakhstan’s flag, usually spanning from 5 to 7 floors, and called ‘Khrushchev’s boxes’ by Karaganda’s citizens due to their monotonous and regular rectangular patterns. There are also new residential areas crowded in micro-districts with fancy names like ‘Green Park,’ ‘French District,’ that number 15 to 17 floors, or Londonized cottages distinctive from the others

by their brown color. A mixture of styles is visible in the architecture of the administrative, business, healthcare, industrial, and trade buildings comprising Regional Government and City Hall, some general and other specialized (Military, Oncology, Pediatric) hospitals, orphanages, and welfare, work-like shelters for the disabled or elderly. Whereas the buildings of administration and business are still painted blue, dark brown, or white (as the newly erected House of Marriages, called White Palace), new kindergartens and schools combine a variety of colors such as green, pink, or brown. Churches of every kind reflect the multi-confessional and ethnic composition of the population, and their cupolas, minarets, and towers scrape the sky together with the chimneys of the legendary EFES brewery, chocolate confectionery, and more than 12 active mines located inside or in the surroundings of the city.

A Catholic Cathedral was opened ten years ago by the German and Polish communities in Karaganda and is famous for its large organ and for the regular classical and religious music concerts. Some Greek-Catholic churches show the presence of ethnic Greeks in the city, while four Orthodox cathedrals and churches, the oldest of which opened in 1946 and the newest still under construction, show the massive presence of a Russian speaking population. Paradoxically, the number of mosques is smaller than that of other confessional establishments, although the ethnic composition is changing. The number of Islam believers is increasing. An architectural detail of possible Muslim origins called *Shanyrak*, symbolizing the ceiling of a yurt and by extension, the spirit of a nomadic family living in this shelter, has been incorporated in the architecture of many buildings, either administration, business, housing, or religious, and represented in stylish rooftop shapes.

Cultural life is manifested in the Kazakh Dramatical Theater *Seifulin*, Russian Dramatical Theater *Stanislavski*, and Puppets Theater *Buratino*. Some pop bands are hosted in multi-functional tennis and volleyball courts every year. Moreover, some movie theaters such as City Mall Multi-Plex and Mining Palace Sary Zhaylau regularly organize film shows. Because the movies are dubbed in Russian and plays are performed in Kazakh and/or Russian, the accessibility for foreigners to see films or theater performances is tacitly limited.

6. Cultural Assets, Past and Present

The hospitality industry displays the same chronological and ideological stratification of clubs, hotels, and restaurants as other areas of creative development. About 32 discos, night clubs, and some ten internet cafés, with Russian and international names, offer karaoke and dancing opportunities, cocktails, spirits and wines, and even striptease (*Fata Morgana Club*). They sport names like Arista, Barbados, Klondike, Dynamic, Elite Club Monarch, Empire Night Club, In Time, Chicago, and The Fifth Corner Russian Rock and Roll. Hotels have a short history in the life of Karaganda; they represent some of the cultural ethnicities that make up the city. One of the oldest hotels, founded in 1980, is called *Chaika* (Seagull). It is notable for having hosted the first Russian, female astronaut, Valentina Thereskova, as well as such personalities as Kazakhstani Toktar Aubakirov and Russian Georgi Beregovoi. Unfortunately, the most valuable wing of this hotel is recognized by local authorities as a sample of cultural heritage and has been closed since 2017. In 2003, an Institute of Chemistry was converted into a hotel with the Kazakhstani name *Dostar Әлем* (The World of Friends), offering spacious conference rooms, bowling, and Arabic Hammam. Paintings on display in the hotel show the cult of the horse specific to Kazakhstani nomadic civilizations. Other hotels and mini-hotels have fancy international names such as *Apart Hotel 92*, *Art Nouveau*, *Cosmonaut*, or *Senator*; they offer fitness services, jacuzzi, and even swimming pools, spa, European and Eastern Asian cuisine, and a rich assortment of wines. These hotels accommodate a small number of international tourists spanning from 10 to 60 per month in the summer. Newly branded and traditional restaurants serving dishes of numerous cuisines such as Armenian (*Tsar Tigran*, *Naira*, *Urartu*), Chinese (*Turandot*), Georgian (*My Tbilisi*), German (*Bachonok* ‘The Barrel,’ *Pivovar* ‘German Brewery’), Italian (*Vecchio Baule*, *La Villa*, *Villa Borghese*) Kazakh, Korean, and Russian (*Medved* ‘The Bear’ *Uighur*) draw local customers and international tourists.

As a way of displaying heritage, museums have recently incorporated an international dimension into their promotion strategies by offering tours in English alongside the traditionally used Kazakh and Russian languages. A small ethnographic and historical museum has curated exhibits showing the history of Karaganda and the region. It draws only a limited number of visitors, mostly pupils and students from surrounding towns and villages. Another exhibition place for recent history is *Dolinka Museum*, which transformed the internment camp, Kar Lag’s,

headquarters into a virtual tour network that includes more than 180 concentration camps, metaphorically called the “Gulag Archipelago” by Russian dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Some famous people like ideologists (Lev Gumilev) and inventors (Tupolev) who were incarcerated there, are hardly mentioned within the exhibition. They are considered as part of the ethnographic, folk culture, as a daily-life manifestation of a politically detained group.

Designed as a tour from the basement and underground cells, dungeons, and torture rooms to the second floor and an attic balcony, the museum is more an ideological excursion in recent history, underlining ambiguous ethnicity through the schematic representation of the yurt’s cupola settled in the main hall at the beginning of the tour. The museum’s design remains too ideological and virtual, offering only some categories of samples, like rooms redecorated to recover the image of daily life in the prison (cells for men and women, rooms for registering and taking mugshots of prisoners, displays to show the activities of people incarcerated such as coal extraction, manufacture of cannons and guns, agriculture and cattle breeding, sewing and weaving, and a library full of ideological literature), anonymous, prototypical administrative prison directors created in plaster cast statues, ethnographic scenes depicting anonymous political detainees, wagons of the freight trains in which people were transported from their homelands, and cultural activities organized for officials’ entertainment are all on display.

The First President Historical and Cultural Center located in Temirtau is the second museum in rank of popularity in the region. Its primary displays show the life and the role of ‘the leader of the nation’ in his recent history as a builder of the city steel factories, and by extension, as founder of the nation. The main displays are a heavy black Mercedes, weighing more than 5 tons, and used by the president only once during his visit in the region, gifts received from the presidents of surrounding countries, images (photographs, paintings, videos) of some of his visits to Karaganda, a model of Astana (the capital city, recently renamed Nur-Sultan, for the, now, former president), and a copy of the steel furnace where he worked as a youth. From an average of 25,000 visitors per year, less than 100 are foreigners, and they are mostly members of business and political delegations which accidentally come to town. A recently opened mining museum in the North District of the city represents the artistic and technical dimensions of industrialized Karaganda. In fact, one exhibit displays a mine in which a visitor can see what a coal extraction establishment looks like without going underground.

There is also a section dedicated to the history of coal extraction in the region, which alongside other images underlines the role of the president in solving labor conflicts among authorities and miners over decades of working underground. Due to limited access only on working days and in minimum groups of 20 people, the museum does not record a significant number of local or international visitors.

Another small art museum hidden among high blocks of apartments currently hosts two main exhibitions with comic representations of dinosaurs for children and contemporary paintings. It has not exceeded 6,000 visitors per year, including a few foreigners. Other museums of ecology and natural history are located in the main universities of Karaganda and are used only for internal purposes. A visitor to these small university museums will see dioramas with samples of local habitat, stuffed birds and animals, and dried, pressed flowers and plants. Even though the museums have recently been included in the sight-seeing tours or one-day excursions organized by the main tourism operators and offer guidance in English, the number of foreign visitors remains quite low due to insufficient promotion to international audiences.

Among the most important and visible sites displaying the heritage of the city are monuments, which, in the case of Karaganda city and the region, surprise by their placement in the main crossroads and squares, in the parks, or in the vicinity of religious places, and by their variety, reflecting historical and political influences. Numerous monuments established across the city and the region aim at recovering noble, nomadic, pastoralist, as well as modern cultural traditions. Some layers of mythical and heroic history have become visible in the stratigraphy of monuments. First of all, like other cities in Kazakhstan, the city tends to view its own founder as a riding hero on a horseback. This stems from folklore ballads and legends, which have lost their historicity, became mythical, and proclaim them as ancestors of contemporary leaders. One example is the sculpture of a horseback rider located at the point where three main roads intersect; it appears to guard the entire south-eastern part of the city. Neither the hero, who was replicated in other cities of the country, nor the stallion with a mousy coat, a leather saddle, and strong wing legs resembling the Turkic *Shubarat* (NAZARBAYEV 2010d: 13) has an inscription to explain its identity or chronology.

In the same field of general and national symbols depicted on the flag or engraved on the state emblem, high pillars erected in the Central Common Hall Square and the Republic Square have on their top a golden eagle protected by a shower of sparks. A pilot who died in the Second

World War, Nurken Abdirov, is commemorated in a sculpture showing him seemingly in his final descent. Soldiers are remembered by the Memorial of Everlasting Fire – in fact – a post-Soviet reminiscence of a tombstone where no names are engraved, and where pupils are gathered to perform mostly patriotic songs next to a yellow star recalling the national flag, which also appears, in red, as an emblem on many civilian, cultural, or even industrial buildings. Some poets born in the region have replicas of their statues in Karaganda city. National poet, Buhar Zhyrau, born in the village Botakhara, north of the city, was placed in front of the headquarters of Arcelor-Mittal Enterprise, the biggest company for coal extraction and steel production in the region. Kasym Amanzholov, a poet born in the Eastern part of the region, in Karkaraly District, is located at the alleyway to the flower-bedecked lawn of Central Park. As a significant representation of the capital of the country, a monument of two miners, their arms stretched over their heads to hold a huge piece of coal, stand across the street from the Mining Culture Palace, whose frontispiece displays, on the roof, the anonymous muses of proletarian arts playing a harp, a flute, a harmonica, and a violin. Not far from this building in a park between the two parallels of Lenin Avenue, is the Musical Theater. On the opposite side, a metal structure watches over Gagarin's Square. Finally, an impressive statue of Lenin watches over the neighborhood. It was moved from the main square into a park that now bears his name. Beyond is a movie theater also named Lenin. Although many other formerly socialist countries demolished Lenin's monuments soon after the 90s, in Kazakhstan he is perceived as a founder and spiritual leader, whose mobilizing messages like 'Learn, learn, learn!' remain inscribed in people's memories, and are still engraved on the walls of some schools in the city. As reverberations of Soviet ideology, some emblematic symbols of socialism have been recovered in the cultural architecture of the city. Among them: the hammer and the sickle, a golden star shown with an eagle and the horns of a ram displayed on plaques, or on the presidential emblem with light blue background. They constitute the heraldic system of the relatively young nation of Kazakhstan.

7. A Creative City's Mixed Results

In summary, in a total absence of ancient architecture venues, but a rather disharmonic mix of modern styles combining monuments of heroic equestrian figures with statues of Lenin, round shaped fountains found in every park, and commemoration to anonymous figures, illuminated letters, and red-colored hearts as signs of appreciation and love in messages translated in English, a mix of Kazakh or Russian with some Arabic, and various nomadic motifs, make the architecture discordant and irregular. Couple all of this with other multicolor lights adorning metal yurts, on blocks of flats, and on traffic lights in the city center (in vivid multi-colored strings of blue, green, red, and yellow switched on year-round) and one can see a result that verges on gaudy and superficial ornamentation of Karaganda's city center. The sum of its parts makes for a discordant attempt at cultural development.

A coherent link between national and regional ideologies specific to an emerging phase of a liberal society and the widely spread code of globalization has generated policies meant to position Kazakhstan as a country able to compete in the international arena. However, the importance of culture for creative industries has not fully developed. Due to the geographic location, historical experiences, political influences, and cultural convergences, a mindset that may be particular to Central Asia, is evident in Kazakhstan pertaining to certain life attitudes, ethnicity definitions, and world views that may impede creative and cultural industries development. Policy makers in Kazakhstan, as well as many of its mainstream scholars of culture and sociology remain loyal to ideological interpretations of culture and society, servants of centralized power, command economy, and state ideology that are characteristic of its former position under Soviet control. Although Karaganda has a number of assets to capitalize on, and a rich history that can form the basis of cultural and creative development, political and ideological shortcomings are a barrier.

Karaganda city and the homonym region remain outside of the international spotlight of creative industries and tourism, although the government and presidency have made some gestures to put them in place by acknowledging the multiethnic composition of the population. There appears to be a gradual awareness of the importance of advertising, branding, and creative industries in the cultural management of the area. Unless the authorities, government, the presidency, and other

decision makers decide to enhance the cultural dimensions of tourism, not too much will change regarding the image and reality of the region. Novelty without history may only stimulate superficial improvements. Presently, the development of tourism in Karaganda may be limited to the post-Soviet arena while Karaganda remains unknown to an international audience.

Increasing cultural awareness, orchestrating soft assets, comprehending the role of diversity, and cultivating an eco-friendly environment may become opportunities to turn the weaknesses into strengths and to transform Karaganda city and the biggest region of Kazakhstan into an attractive tourist destination. Despite some vaguely articulated policies, Karaganda city and the homonym region are still far from becoming a place undergoing a creative industry development and a tourism renaissance.

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