A PLAN FOR THE PROLETARIAT

I have stored the whole of Baku in me—in this way Baku is different . . .

I have had the opportunity to become acquainted with many cities in my work.
But this city, where construction is livelier than in other cities in our Union—it’s magic. Here, new plans are being realized.

—ALEKSANDR IVANITSKII (1930)

The Soviet planner Aleksandr Ivanitskii was not prone to poetics. But for him, Baku was nothing short of magical. The city held extraordinary status among others in the new Soviet Union, Ivanitskii stressed, because it was in Baku that socialist construction was coming to fruition. Although the 1935 General Plan for Moscow has been cited as the working model for the Soviet city, Baku in the mid to late 1920s was its proving grounds.² In the geographically peripheral but economically central city of Baku, concerns that drove most Union-wide spatial planning from the first Five-Year Plan on were formulated and tested. These included state control of housing, planned development of residential areas, limited journey to work, spatial equality in the distribution of items of collective consumption, stringent land-use zoning, rationalized traffic flow, and extensive green space.² The first items on this list—provision of housing, walkability, and collective services—were tested and installed in Baku’s experimental settlements of Stepan Razin and Armenikend. The latter items—rationalized zoning, traffic, and green space networks—could only be worked out at the city and regional scales, as they were in the first Soviet general plan undertaken from 1924 to 1927 in Baku.

Hemmed in by oil extraction sites to the north, east, and west, and the Caspian Sea to the south, Ivanitskii and his team had no choice but to grapple with the unruly city of the present in the 1927 General Plan for Baku. Copious sketches, plans, and
photographs from Ivanitskii’s archive make it possible to follow how the Baku planning process unfolded, and specifically how the planners worked creatively in the absence of reliable data about existing conditions. The planning team developed a diagrammatic language to distill information gathered from past cartographic work, facts and figures from various branches of government, and firsthand observation. Empirical data was critical to the plan’s success, but a large degree of invention on the planners’ part was also required.

Ivanitskii’s Azneft and Baksovet clients are actors in this story, acquisitive participants in the establishment of Baku’s first socialist housing and general plan. They were not universally enlightened; willful misunderstanding and obstructionism by the Baksovet administrators and staff plagued Ivanitskii’s five-year consultancy. The big picture, however, is that the general planning effort in Baku built a cadre of planning-savvy local administrators in addition to diagrams and projective maps.

The plan for Baku that emerged over the course of three years was a calibrated mixture of capitalist and socialist urban models, and as such represents a transitional response entirely appropriate to the time of its formulation, the NEP. Only by utilizing all planning tools available, regardless of derivation, could Ivanitskii bridge the gap between the formerly capitalist petro-city and its socialist progeny.

**Building Socialist Planning Clients during NEP**

Baksovet, the client for the general plan, served under the Presidium of the Baku Executive Committee (Bakispolkom), the city’s highest governing body. For the plan, the Baku Executive Committee was intermediary between the municipal government and the state apparatus in Moscow, and most important, the overseer of the city’s budget. At their December 1924 meeting, the Baku Executive Committee allocated 1 million rubles for the 1925 building season, an amount that the Baksovet Building Committee was not to exceed. Compared to the 4.2 million rubles that Azneft spent on worker settlement housing over the 1923–24 building seasons, the Baksovet allocation is shockingly small. The problem for the Baksovet was fiscal sourcing. Unlike Azneft, the municipality had no self-generated income.

V. S. Krylov, chair of the Baksovet Building Committee, proposed two funding streams for the city’s capital campaign. Long-term credit for construction would be requested from “the center,” i.e., Moscow, and the Building Committee would prepare materials and propose terms to receive that credit from the Soviet capital. The more lucrative, locally based fiscal source would come from the imposition of a 25 percent industrial tax (*promnalog*), earmarked for residential construction. The financial and legal departments of the Baksovet were charged to research existing provisions in the Russian Republic for the imposition of such a tax and to draw up an appropriate decree. The Baksovet protocol suggests that there was no codified system for generating capital funding and that Soviet municipalities were left to guess how to levy taxes, strong-arm constituents, and petition higher powers to finance a public
project and balance its own books. An early Soviet capital project had to “pay for itself,” as a fictional NEP-era anecdote suggested. Land allocation was one critical aspect of the project structure that the Baksovet did have under its immediate control. Despite the fact that the Baksovet and Azneft planning efforts overlapped, the oil company had to appeal to the city for permission to utilize nationalized land for their worker settlements. Having the same planner, Ivanitskii, at work on both plans simultaneously smoothed friction that the two projects naturally may have generated.

Both the Azneft and Baksovet client groups gained expertise through Ivanitskii, who brought knowledge about international planning practices to Baku. Like Azneft, the Baksovet Building Committee established a planning and construction library of Russian and foreign language books to bring their in-house engineers up to speed. But high-ranking members of the Baksovet also wished to immerse themselves in firsthand precedent gathering. In February 1925, just months into Ivanitskii’s consultancy, the Baksovet determined that a reconnaissance business trip (komandirovka) was in order. The Presidium of the Baksovet requested permission from the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to send a commission to Europe. The purpose of the trip was to permit the three-person commission “to familiarize themselves with the achievements of Western European technology in the realm of worker housing and to learn about contemporary conditions of communal organizations and municipal improvements.” The travelers proposed to visit large urban centers in Germany, France, England, and Italy.

In their request, the Baksovet commission proffered two arguments in favor of the research trip. Commission members would gain firsthand knowledge of European precedents in civic improvement. The travelers would return eager to share best practices with colleagues in Baku, and they would be more able to engage intelligently with Ivanitskii and his planning staff on the forthcoming general plan project. Equally important, the commission members would enter into talks with foreign firms concerning orders for equipment “that cannot be produced in Russia.” Parisian discussions would be with a firm specializing in garbage incineration systems. In England, the trio would meet with the sewer equipment manufacturer, Adams. The Baksovet commission had already reached out to a number of Berlin-based infrastructural equipment firms with whom they would engage in face-to-face negotiation. Particular attention would be paid to Germany on the trip, given “the importance of social contacts, especially as they have the closest ties to us economically.”

The proposed European tour for the Baksovet commission had Ivanitskii’s fingerprints all over it. He had extensive experience organizing research trips abroad. After graduating from the Institute of Civil Engineering in St. Petersburg in 1904, Ivanitskii traveled on several fact-finding trips through European cities. One itinerary, in 1910, covered Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, and Italy. Of that trip Ivanitskii later wrote that “the value of the research trip . . . was in learning the issues of overall improvement of residential areas. On the one hand, there were the urban design complexes of Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Antwerp, Amsterdam, Marseilles, Genoa,
Milan, Rome, and other cities. On the other hand, were issues of planning of smaller towns and sites of the ‘garden city’ type, and issues of constructing seaside resorts.”

When Ivanitskii was invited to speak about settlement planning in Baku, he did so on the heels of his latest trip abroad to participate in an international planning conference held in London. All five English cities on the proposed Baksovet commission itinerary were the ones featured in his first presentation in Baku. For Ivanitskii, travel generated implementable ideas and effectively combated professional insularity. A grand tour of Europe, therefore, was the swiftest means to overcome provincialism in the Baksovet’s administrative staff. Just as Azneft’s director Aleksandr Serebrovskii returned to Baku from the United States with equipment, books, and washing machines, the Baksovet’s commission returned with European models for worker housing and civic improvement.

Tracing and Mapping

Ivanitskii’s planning team began their work on the Baku Plan in the late fall of 1924 but were immediately stymied by a paucity of contextual information about the city. Ivanitskii characterized the cartographic materials his team was given by the Baksovet as “incomplete and outdated,” and the demographic data as “well below standard.” As the Azneft Building Committee had realized back in 1920, there were no accurate topographical and existing conditions plans of Baku. Unfortunately, the same situation held in 1924. In the absence of site-specific details, Ivanitskii gathered specialists from various disciplines—public health and municipal services specialists, economists, engineers—to frame broad planning objectives.

When the planning team embarked on its work, the Baku municipal government began to capture and compile a detailed survey of the city, a task that stretched through 1925 and 1926. Certain areas of the city were difficult to survey quickly and fell out of the planning scope of work. Icheri sheher was the first area eliminated from the general plan. Ivanitskii advocated for preservation of the historic Islamic quarter and argued that surveyors would be unable to accurately plot the irregular structures of the old town or assess archaeological findings while under the pressure of time. The Black and White Towns were also excluded from detailed planning once it became clear that Azneft would not readily open their industrial installations to municipal surveying crews. While waiting for existing conditions surveys of the city proper the planning team, working largely from Moscow, collected all previous graphic representations of Baku that they could get their hands on, including maps from 1864, 1911, and 1913. They also began their own observational research and gathered social-scientific datasets to use as bases for their work.

Ivanitskii’s Baku planning team adopted two exploratory drawing methods at the start of the process to build their knowledge of place and to pinpoint issues that the plan would later address. These methods align with James Corner’s categories of
tracing and mapping. Tracing is defined as “equal to what is.” In practice, a tracing can emerge from the planner placing a piece of translucent paper over an existing city plan and faithfully replicating the original. This is not a mindless task, however; through inscription, the tracer gains knowledge of the place being reproduced. Mapping, by contrast, is “equal to what is and what is not yet.” Mapping is a practice that requires invention. It may begin with a rough sketch of the existing condition, but it projects beyond it to elicit information not explicitly articulated before and to anticipate what lies ahead. For Corner, mapping is unquestionably superior as a creative method because, “unlike tracings, which propagate redundancies, mappings discover new worlds within the past and present ones; they inaugurate new grounds upon the hidden traces of a living context.” Although maps that imagined a future Baku were the ultimate deliverables for the 1927 Plan, tracing was an inevitable and productive first step for cartographic engagement.

The earliest drawings by Ivanitskii’s team are abstracted tracings of Baku’s 1864 and 1913 plans. Labeling their 1864 tracing “a copy of a copy,” the team drew the pre-oil boom urban fabric, carefully outlining the intricate block structure of iceri sheher, the rectangular grid of the colonial Russian forshadt, the Russian and Muslim cemeteries, and the steep rocky ledge and quarry to the northwest of the built core (figure 3.1). This exercise would immediately heighten awareness of the historical and topographical materiality of Baku. The planning team’s tracing of the 1913 plan—the von der Nonne plan of the city, printed as fact—reveals the earlier scheme’s blatant disregard for the topographical complexity of the city and its blithe orthogonality (figure 3.2). Despite the 1913 map’s questionable fidelity to existing
conditions, in tracing it Ivanitskii’s team became acquainted with Baku’s tendency to expand in a northeasterly direction. Redrawing von der Nonne’s scheme also highlighted certain assets of the older plan, like the proposed open space network, rendered in a dark wash in their copy.

The team began mapping with a series of cartograms (kartogrammy) that they developed soon after completing the tracings. A cartogram is a statistical map—a diagram that consciously retains a cartographic base while inserting quantitative data in a novel way. Drawings categorized as cartograms might use color, shading, contour lines, hatches, dots, and small inset graphs or tables to “show geographically statistics of various kinds.” In producing such analytical illustrations for his initial work in Baku, Ivanitskii was tapping into practices long utilized by Russian social scientists. Because of the advanced petro-technical apparatus in Baku, certain statistical data was available for use by the planning team, and its deployment on top of the outdated maps added a degree of contemporaneity. The combination of two forms of objective data—the survey-based map, no matter how outdated, and statistics—jibed with the assertion of planning as an analytical science more than an art, a claim that Ivanitskii was at pains to reiterate in many of his published texts. The resulting cartograms are fully engaged with both material and quantitative facts of Baku, and in crafting them, the planning team inventively layered varied types of information to perform interpretive acts on the city. Each cartogram makes an argument, for as Corner notes, “mapping is never neutral, [but] is perhaps the most formative and creative act of any design process, first disclosing and then staging the conditions for the emergence of new realities.” The cartograms, which are polemical drawings, reveal the planners’ professional preoccupations and set the stage “for new eidetic and physical worlds to emerge.”

The 1913 Baku Plan was the planning team’s base for all of the cartograms. Ivanitskii’s assistants reproduced it onto vellum sheets at a common scale. The final cartograms fall into two main categories. The first set is concerned with the infrastructural qualities of Baku and addresses questions of efficiency, organization, and modernization (figure 3.4). Topics in this group cover territorial growth from 1843, the paths of tramlines and electric cables, street paving materials, and property taxation. A second set centers on demographic issues including population density, “unhealthy” places in the city (dumps, swamps, etc.), and epidemic prevalence by region.

In highlighting water- and air-borne disease in the dense city neighborhoods as a primary planning concern, the Baku team was following a rationale set by European planners since at least the 1850s. Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s intensive modernization of Paris, undertaken after a series of cholera epidemics, was justified most convincingly as a public health intervention. In Germany, engineer Josef Stübben’s influential book on urban planning City-Building (Der Städtebau, 1890), well-studied in Russia, didactically outlined the necessary provisions for
A PLAN FOR THE PROLETARIAT

urban health. Favorable soil, adequate sewage disposal, wholesome drinking water, fresh air, and greenery are all addressed in the first Soviet plan for Baku. Ivanitskii may have also gained knowledge of hygienic planning closer to home. In his work as a young planner for Leontii Benois in St. Petersburg, Ivanitskii likely came into contact with F. Enakiev, an engineer from the Ministry of Communications and the author of Tasks for the Reform of St. Petersburg (Zadachi preobrazovaniia S.-Peterburga, 1912), a book that proposed replanning the imperial capital according to hygiene and traffic movement.22
The epidemiological cartogram for Baku places information about the occurrence of cholera, typhus, and dysentery in 1921 and 1923 in simple bar graphs over various regions of the city (figure 3.5). Cholera outbreaks in 1907, 1908, 1909, and 1910 were the result of the city’s poor water and sewage systems, a problem addressed—but not entirely solved—by the Shollar Pipeline completed in 1917 that carried fresh water 170 kilometers from the Caucasus Mountains. The epidemiological cartogram communicates the common threat of poor urban infrastructure and the unevenness of that threat across city neighborhoods. The one notable graphic aberration on the cartogram occurs in the industrial stronghold of the Black Town, the most easterly neighborhood of the city, which has spikes for typhus and dysentery that nearly match those for cholera. The civic danger of proximity between industry and residential life is encapsulated in the graphic cross-comparison of Baku’s urban neighborhoods that the planners produced despite limited access to data.
Although each cartogram is a snapshot of a specific urban condition, the operative benefit of the effort arose in layering different types of data. Ivanitskii described the process of cartogrammatic discovery in a 1925 article on the Baku Plan:

By comparing these cartograms, which are exactly the same by scale and symbol, it is easy to orient one’s self to those places that most need planning intervention, and the character of those interventions. It is easy to see that in parts of the plan surgery (operativnoe meshatel’stvo) is necessary, that is replanning. In those parts of the city the cartogram shows layered patches denoting places with primitive structures, swampy territories, places with unfavorable sanitary characteristics, and so on. In other situations, therapy or prophylactic planning (terapiia ili profilaktika planirovki) is needed, that is the regularization of the existing plan. 24
Plotting the individual data sets on semitransparent sheets, and overlaying them on one another, allowed problem areas in the city to emerge. Certain regions, like the neighborhoods to the west of the old town that cling to the slopes of the Nagornoe Plateau are darkened in the cartograms by a density of problematic characteristics such as difficult topography, propensity for illness, and morbidity. This toxic combination, seen so clearly on the layered sheets, justified plan surgery—that is, total replanning. Prophylactic planning, on the other hand, was all that was needed in much of the rest of the city: minor street widening, grid correction, insertion of plantings, and public amenities. The team’s mappings also included other types of diagrams that captured the path of the sun, thermal effects, and direction of the prevailing northern winds.

The interrelation of Baku’s oil, demographics, capital construction, and territorial growth is the issue addressed in one remarkable diagram produced by the planning team (figure 3.6). On the x-axis of the graph runs a common chronology: from 1880—the beginning of the first oil boom—to 1930, five years into Baku’s future.

Figure 3.6. Diagram no. 1, Baku Plan, 1927. The interrelation of Baku’s oil, demographics, capital construction, and territorial growth are shown in this diagram. On the x-axis of the graph runs a common chronology: from 1880—the beginning of the first oil boom—to 1930, five years into Baku’s future. The graph charts five distinct data sets. First from the bottom runs a line that follows the fairly shallow rise of the number of structures built within the city (з); the second line charts the absolute urban area as the city limits expanded (Γ); the third shows population growth (Л). Above a thin line of demarcation are the two prime generators of the city’s growth: volume of oil extracted (Нд), and volume exported (Нс). Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 47.
The diagram charts five distinct data sets. First from the bottom runs a line that follows the fairly shallow rise of the number of structures built within the city (3); the second line charts the absolute urban area as the city limits expanded (Г); the third shows population growth (И). Above a thin line of demarcation are the two prime generators of the city’s growth: volume of oil extracted (Нд), and volume exported (Нэ, exportation data, is plotted from 1908 on). These five indicators and their coordination illuminate the planners’ desire to cross-reference the particular socioeconomic factors at play in Baku’s urban growth.

Urban population control, a particular concern in Soviet planning from the 1930s on, is addressed in another diagram that plots two sets of data: the gross population of Baku beginning in 1859, at 135,000 residents, and the annual change in population growth (figure 3.7). The planning team recommended that Baku’s population growth taper from 7 percent annually to a steady 1.5 percent fifty years into the future. Interdisciplinary analyses such as this population projection drove

Figure 3.7. Diagram No. 2, Baku Plan, 1927. “Population curves on sliding scales from 7 percent to 1.5 percent, with an initial population of 317,700.” The population lines (annual growth rate on the top and raw population on the bottom) cross at three anomalous moments. The first crossing indicates the drastic population decline during the Russian Civil War (1917). The second crossing marks a dramatic population increase in the first year of Bolshevik rule (1920). The last crossing, occurring in 1930, is projective. The actual population of Baku in 1970 was only 37,000 residents off from Ivanitskii’s projection. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 48.
planning decisions like the expansion of municipal territory. The plan’s prescience was proven in time. According to the 1970 Soviet census, the actual population of Baku was a mere 37,000 residents off from Ivanitskii’s projection, and the city limit set by the 1927 plan was untouched in both the 1937 and 1954 general plan revisions. The Ivanitskii Plan accurately predicted the direction of growth and the territory required to accommodate it.

After the first round of drawing the team engaged in projective mapping, attacking problems identified by the cartograms and diagrams. The most detailed draft plan graphically inverts figure and ground to depict the volumetric conditions of Baku’s urban fabric (figure 3.8). Here, and in all subsequent versions of the Baku

![Draft of the Baku Plan, 1925. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 51.](image)

**Figure 3.8.** Draft of the Baku Plan, 1925. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 51.
Plan, built structures are rendered darkest, planted areas slightly lighter, and connective elements (streets, squares, and plazas) remain white. Although the graphic language accords with planning output produced concurrently in capitalist cities, the drawing also begins to suggest conceptual parity between material (black) and social (gray and white) infrastructure, a hallmark of socialist planning in subsequent decades.

**Hammering Out the Tasks for Socialist Planning**

Ivanitskii traveled to Baku at the end of May 1926 to update his clients on the plan’s progress. Although the project was a year and a half in, Ivanitskii had little graphic material to show to the Baku Executive Committee and the Baksovet Planning Commission. He left the cartograms in Moscow because they were large, unwieldy, and would have been damaged in transit. Six of them, along with a draft version of the plan, had made their national debut at the first All-Union Sanitary Technical Conference in Kharkiv, in May 1925, and were not up to another long trip.26 Ivanitskii did bring a handful of glass lantern slides, but the meeting was held early in the day and the room was too light for his audience to see them. He was forced to detail the team’s preliminary research findings with little illustrative backup.

In his presentation to the Baku Executive Committee, Ivanitskii posed a singular question: how might disparate parts of Baku better connect? To answer it, he stressed that due to the territorial reach of the oil economy, the Baku Plan was not a city plan but a regional plan. He had already explained his reasoning for initiating the Baku Plan at the regional scale in a 1925 interview with the newspaper *Baku Worker* (*Bakinskii rabochii*):

The project raises many issues regarding the growth and improvement over the next two to three decades of a rapidly expanding city like Baku. On one side are issues having to do with the growth of suburban industries and factory territories, rail lines and the port, and questions of integrating transport. On the other side are issues of sanitation and local education, construction of hospitals and schools, exercise and sports facilities. Large settlement construction developed by the exceptionally powerful economic organization, Azneft, in an area so close to the city of Baku, suggests that future expansion may simply merge the efforts. All of this leads us to consider not only the city but the whole region.27

Baku’s expanding urban core would soon touch, and eventually subsume, Binagady and Montina, the Azneft settlements closest to the city center. Ivanitskii argued that it was simply impractical to plan discrete city sections without considering the implications of such expansion.
To determine the scope of planning work, Ivanitskii explained, the planner must understand that his target is “above all an expansion plan, a zoning plan, and a plan for communication between each of the regions as well as a plan of overall linkages within in the locality and beyond— with the province, the region and the entire country.” He also made shrewd economic arguments for regional-scale planning, citing capitalist logic to do so. A city’s productive capacity, he noted, relies on its ability to equally accommodate industry and commerce. Rational planning, per the US model, projects the territorial and infrastructural needs of industry so that economic growth is barrier free. But further, “a city plan that is technically well designed and economically feasible, and that considers the topography, soil properties, and technical requirements of different types of construction, results in substantial savings in construction.” Planning is, in short, both a revenue-generating and cost-saving exercise.

Regional planning was of concern on the Apsheron Peninsula from the time of Baku’s first oil boom in the 1870s. An detailed 1899 map of existing conditions plots the peninsula’s undulating pockets of oil and privately owned oil-bearing parcels (plate 9). Baku is simply the most densely developed seaside area of a large mineral-rich territory subdivided by private interests. The map reveals that there was little infrastructure to link the peninsula as an interdependent whole, however. Individual industrialists like the Nobels built and maintained their own extraction sites, pipelines, refineries, and transportation. Under socialism, the peninsular region could planned holistically because land nationalization permitted thinking well beyond the private plot or even the municipality. The originating center of Ivanitskii’s regional plan is *icheri sheher*, Baku’s historic Islamic core (figure 3.9). Its dark urbanized center is surrounded by a ring of more diffuse settlement, which in turn gives way to a dark crescent of oil-bearing land in the middle of the peninsula. The city and oilfields are held in tension by a net of crisscrossing roads, trams, and rail lines. The Azneft worker settlements sit in the intermediate zone between them—the expansion zone—and benefit from the dense transportation network that connects the civil city and its industry. Beyond the oil lands, an amorphous gray zone reaches all the way up to the peninsula’s north shore and fingers to the west, encompassing a number of dark patches planned as future urban subcenters. The entire peninsula is engaged and integrated.

Ivanitskii then addressed the spatial implications of demographic growth. The cartograms abstractly conveyed Baku’s expansion since the oil boom in the 1870s, but two city scale drawings confirmed this fact territorially. The first shows the expansion of ratified municipal boundaries in 1877, 1898, and 1926, and proposes a new boundary for 1927 to increase the city’s official footprint and incorporate the new Azneft settlements (figure 3.10). An accompanying drawing demonstrates that Baku, a consummate boomtown, grew in surges to create distinct morphological regions color coded and dated on the diagram (figure 3.11). The darker the swatch, the older the neighborhood. The diagrams capture Baku’s tendency to expand in a
Figure 3.9. Apsheron Peninsula general plan (based on the 1899 Apsheron Plan), August 20, 1927. The dark urbanized center of Baku is surrounded by a light-colored ring of more diffuse settlement that gives way to a dark crescent of oil-bearing land. The city and oilfields are linked by transportation lines and the Azneft worker settlements sit in the intermediate zone between them. Future urban subcenters are indicated by gray zones throughout the peninsula. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 27.

Figure 3.10. Expansion of city boundaries by year, Baku Plan, 1927. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 28.
northeasterly direction toward the oilfields, a direction that the 1927 plan would allow and yet also harness with a new city limit.

Ivanitskii explained to his clients that in German or US boomtowns growing at similarly steep rates as Baku, high density correlated with tall building. In Baku by contrast, high density correlated with “dwarf plots” (karlikovye uchastki), tiny parcels resulting from excessive subdivision. In the dwarf plot condition—which accounted for 40 percent of properties within the city limits—individual low-rise houses were constructed right up to the parcel line to maximize buildable area.29 Small cobbled together structures sat cheek-by-jowl, which left insufficient open space and fresh air and prohibited the installation of municipal services such as running water or sewer. Disease spread quickly in these parts of the city. Beyond health concerns, the haphazard pattern of the dense built fabric impeded efficient passage through the city. The planning team’s solution was to modify these dense neighborhoods carefully, taking “extreme care” to draw lines on the plan that would inconvenience the fewest possible residents. Ivanitskii referred to these sensitive interventions as “surgical measures” (khirurgicheskie mery).30 Lastly, he recommended five regions of the city to receive detailed design attention. These included Bailov/Chemberekend, the Nagornoe Plateau/Region, Armenikend/Veer, Zavokzalnyi (rail station) Region, the Kirpich-Khana/Kani-tapa neighborhoods
Figure 3.12. Plan of the city divided by region, 1927. Key to regions that received detailed planning:

(figure 3.12). These five regions encompassed the entire northern and western territory of the city and required that the planners tackle the most challenging neighborhoods in terms of density and topography.

After Ivanitskii’s presentations, the Baku Executive Committee and Baksovet Planning Committee passed identical resolutions that solidified six key tasks for the city’s first socialist general plan:

a) The city territory must be zoned and distributed into industrial sites and sites for construction (city, semiurban, and settlement-suburban construction);

b) the city plan must be coherent and align technically with the proposed worker settlements;

c) the city plan must align with the railroad lines and the port;

d) a system of public squares and magistrals must be developed;

e) a system of green planting, playgrounds, and sports parks must be composed and grow gradually; and

f) unobstructed sewage and storm water systems must be installed.⁵¹
The administrators listened to Ivanitskii’s proposals and then returned them as a formal mandate. At the regional scale, the city would be zoned into separate industrial and residential areas. The plan of the city would be cognizant of and work with worker settlements in the peri-urban regions and with rail and water transportation networks. The urban fabric would be knit together with boulevards, public squares, parks, and planting. Finally, municipal water and waste services would be provided to all neighborhoods. “Conclusive propositions” from the planning team were due no later than November 1926, five months from the date of the resolution.

The first socialist general plan for Baku is commonly known by two names: the 1927 Plan and the Ivanitskii Plan. As the temporal name indicates, the bulk of the plan was finished in mid-1927, not November 1926 as requested. In March 1927, Ivanitskii wrote to his clients to update them on planning progress and to send along a bundle of working drawings. His letter made clear that he felt extreme pressure to complete the work, and certainly wished to do so, but that there were many reasons for schedule setbacks. Ivanitskii received the long-awaited municipal survey only at the very end of 1926, and even after the long wait, it was imperfect. “A lot of time was wasted dealing with the numerous discrepancies and insufficiencies of the surveys,” Ivanitskii complained. “In order to save money, the survey was not taken exactly along the regions to be planned. Further, old surveys were utilized for some sections that either were difficult or simply impossible to align with the new.”

The planning team struggled to determine which aspects of the survey could be trusted. Given that roads were being punched through, houses demolished, and trees planted along their pencil lines, lack of confidence in the survey produced anxiety among the planning team.

A personal letter from Ivanitskii to his primary client, the deputy director of the Baku Department of Communal Services, revealed the two issues that caused the planner most emotional distress. The territory covered by the plan increased exponentially over the years, whereas funding had decreased. His fee for the detailed plan had recently been trimmed, and Ivanitskii was forced to accept it. “We are extremely exhausted by the lack of money for the project. I blame myself,” he wrote of his capitulation, “but it doesn’t help.” Ivanitskii stressed that the plan needed to be completed professionally and responsibly, despite lack of funds. “I cannot crumple up the work or slapdash it, and I also cannot allow you to deploy the plan until all of the planning work is completed and applied to the overall master plan. I am doing everything I can to keep your work going: punching streets through, planning new neighborhoods, dividing the land into building plots, and so forth.” He promised to send neighborhood blueprints as they were completed, so that the city could begin construction in targeted areas without waiting for the comprehensive general plan. Ivanitskii requested that the client send him half of the amount that remained in the project budget to push the work through.
Ivanitskii was also concerned by the increasing “hostility, quibbles, stopped work, and curtailed job estimates” in his dealings with technical staff at the Baku Department of Communal Services, who appeared to be purposely torpedoing aspects of the plan. Already, he had to stop faulty commencement of extensive tree planting in the city. The long east-west boulevard that Ivanitskii drew below the Armenikend district followed the line of the green cross in the von der Nonne plan and connected institutions and civic squares including the hospital, one of the city’s main reservoirs, and the radio tower. Its location was carefully calibrated to waste the least amount of buildable land. “Now,” Ivanitskii claimed, “the boulevard has been moved lower by someone, based on the alleged verbal agreement of M. A. Kniazkov, who energetically denies it. Dragged lower in the plan, the line of plantings takes up four free blocks below the reservoir, it falls on the sloping hillside, and denies Armenikend its correct shape.” The incorrectly located boulevard—already planted with trees—threatened to ruin the planned structure of the whole northern portion of the city. Ivanitskii enclosed a drawing that reiterated the proper location of the boulevard in protest and recommended “liquidation” of the erroneous plantings.

The 1927 Baku Plan: Stitching the City

Ivanitskii and his planning team completed the final version of the Baku General Plan in August 1927. The client had narrowed the scope of the plan due to “budget economization” and simply to get the work in hand. The main deliverables were just six drawings: a comprehensive plan of the city within municipal boundaries and five detailed plans of the city’s most troublesome regions. Ivanitskii made clear in his final report that budget limitations did not allow for detailed technical development of citywide standards such as the longitudinal and transversal street sections or the planting system, though he would provide diagrammatic recommendations. Nonetheless, he felt confident that the structure of the plan, and the municipal boundaries set by it, would serve Baku through 1957, when the city’s intense growth would taper.

The general plan is a large pencil drawing thick with information, composed of four equal sheets assembled to make the whole (figure 3.13). The planners divided the city into five height and density zones. The darkest and densest areas correlate with icheh sheher and the forschtadt, followed by other built-up sections of the city closest to the Caspian shoreline. Areas to the north, west, and east become less dense and are thus are shaded in a gradient that lightens as it grows away from the center.

The shaded blocks are the body of the plan, whereas the streets and open spaces—the nervous system and organs—are rendered in stark white and black. The white
Figure 3.13. Baku Plan, 1927. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f.2 991, o. 1, d. 17, ll. 152, 153, 154, 155. Key diagram by the author.
strips and openings that run through the plan are the network of streets and squares that Ivanitskii referred to as the city’s “nerves.” The longest and widest white strips are the magistrals (main thoroughfares) that connect disparate parts of the city. Baku’s organs are the black patches on the plan that indicate parks, sports grounds, planted boulevards, and civic institutions. Ivanitskii explained the relationship between the systems:

The magistral is one important aspect that creates social organization in the city plan. The additional parts are the squares and the locations set aside for public buildings. If we construct a massive system of magistrals and squares but indicate no proper locations for public buildings where they can command a certain radius, then the plan is not correctly socially organized. We consider by contrast European and American cities that are built by private-capitalist concerns, in which you don’t see such organization in the plan. Indicated on our plan are also locations for a square and a public building in each city region. Each region will have its own central square (of cultural or administrative function)—this creates organization in the plan.

According to Ivanitskii’s logic, the Baku Plan was socialist because the streets, squares, and public buildings worked together across the breadth of the city, and yet each neighborhood was also provided with its own center to ensure distributive equality of civic institutions and places of leisure. The unjust hierarchies that Ivanitskii witnessed in capitalist cities were combated in the Baku Plan by spatial diffusion of important connective streets and public programs, especially green space. Both of these important aspects of the plan are covered in turn.

Connective Logics: Magistrals

The principal solution to Baku’s connective problems, and the main organizational tool of the 1927 plan, was the magistral: a wide road, or boulevard. These arteries served to connect main spaces in the center efficiently with one another and with industrial enterprises outside the city. Surface transportation followed these lines, inscribing them on the collective consciousness.

When design for the Baku Plan began, the city’s street network was a messy tangle, the result of the medieval Islamic core clashing with the middle-scale Russian colonial grid and the large-scale industrial grid. Ivanitskii determined that the city’s dysfunctional street network was the core problem to be solved. “Baku, an industrial city with significant economic activity, needs a structure to its plan to maximize linkages between outlying regions and industrial regions that lie to the north, east, and south of the city. Further, the crazy circulation (beshenaia tsirculiatsiia) in the city does not accommodate public masses, trucks, etc., that also require clear
magistrals. In the city these do not exist.”41 Here, Ivanitskii raised two separate street-based issues: poor connectivity between the center and the outlying regions, and traffic congestion in the center. To address the first, the planning team linked the city, new worker settlements, and industrial sites with rail and roads. Careful attention was paid at the regional scale to topography and existing rail and pipeline networks to determine efficient trajectories. Urban congestion required a more invasive solution since dense neighborhoods had to be cut through to remove blockages. Before the plan was completed Torgovaia Street (now Nizami), that runs parallel to the Caspian coast from the Black Town to iceri sheher, began in the east at 84 feet wide and progressively narrowed as it moved westward to 70 feet, 50 feet, 35 feet, and finally just 28 feet wide by the time it landed in the oldest part of the city as Torgovaia Lane. The traffic jams that resulted from this one bottleneck, even in 1927, led to “catastrophic effects” on city movement.42

The planning team designed six magistrals in detail that included the seaside boulevard, the east-west link between the Nagornoe Plateau and the Black Town, and the north-south road that connected the shore to the middle of the Apsheron Peninsula (figure 3.14).43 In an accompanying construction phasing diagram, magistrals are clearly legible as white lines that cut through existing fabric and link civic spaces (figure 3.15). The first phase of development on this plan is darkest—generally, near

![Figure 3.14. Magistrals and streets, Baku Plan, 1927. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 60.](image1)

![Figure 3.15. Construction phasing by region, Baku Plan, 1927. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 61.](image2)
Figure 3.16. Iur’evskaia Street located on the detailed plan of the Nagornyi Region and Nagornoe Plateau, Baku Plan, 1927. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. Diagram by the author based on RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 84.

Figure 3.17. Punching through Iur’evskaia Street. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f. 2991, o. 1, d. 17, l. 71.
the Caspian shoreline—but the magistrals are arms that reach into poorly developed areas to set the stage for future growth. Later Soviet general plans used Ivanitskii’s 1927 magistral skeleton to situate strategic capital improvements.

The magistral that received the most design attention was Iur’evskaia Street (now Nariman Narimanov Avenue) that runs north-south along a steep slope from the Nagornoe Plateau down toward icheri sheher (figure 3.16). Because of its difficult topography, the Nagornoe Plateau was one of the most poorly planned and constructed neighborhoods in Baku. It suffered from microparcelization (dwarf plots), and the majority of the tiny houses sat haphazardly in relation to one another and blocked routes of passage. Ivanitskii proposed planning surgery to “punch through” (pro-bivat’) the neighborhood to create a magistral for tram and bus traffic. The ghostly footprints of each structure impacted by the proposed demolition show through the vellum sheets the planners laid over the survey (figure 3.17). Ivanitskii tallied that 496 structures would have to be removed to install a proper network of magistrals. An additional 214 structures would be demolished for construction of squares and open space. The team evaluated the age, height, character, and monetary value of the 710 affected structures and determined that 552 (77 percent) sat on dwarf plots of just 42–49 square feet. “This fits one room,” Ivanitskii told his clients, “and in that room sometimes there is one apartment, sometimes a few. These are unbelievably (neveroiatnye) poor structures in terms of quality and sanitary conditions!”

In the summer of 1928, local photographer Lavrentii Bregadze documented the neighborhood, the structures, and the Bakuvians affected by the magistral clearance project. These photographs follow the nineteenth-century practice of capturing the process of urban modernization midstream. On July 5, 1928, Bregadze captured demolition and construction work at various points along the path of Iur’evskaia Street. The majority of the shots were taken from a slightly elevated vantage point and provide deep views of the ongoing urban transformation.

One photograph, likely taken from a rooftop, shows overlapping layers of single-story houses as they recede into the distance and climb the hill to the west (plate 10). Piles of dirt, stone, and wood sit on the edges of an emerging pathway through the dense quarter; women wrapped in black chadors stand out against the light-colored footpath. Bregadze often posed his human subjects to mark the scale of intervention. In one image, a multigenerational group stands in the middle of a cleared passage (plate 11). A line of children takes the front: a white-shirted child stands before a fully covered woman, two barefoot boys, and a naked toddler. In the background, clearing work proceeds. Pairs of men carry planks piled with rubble, and mules and carts stand ready to transport it away. Another photograph along the future magistral’s path captures a scene in which clearing has concluded (figure 3.18). The generous width of the street is measured by more than a dozen figures who stand in a single line across the clearing and still do not reach the buildings on either side. Neatly orthogonal buildings line the cleared, modernized path of movement.
Ivanitskii attentively followed major demolition and construction work in Baku from his office in Moscow. On a copy of the plan drawing, he hand-notated the major infrastructural projects underway and referred to the Bregadze photographs that documented the planning interventions (plate 12). Ivanitskii was aware of and sensitive to the physical labor and massive displacement his plan required. He argued, however, that “the experience at Iur’evskaia proved that it was the right thing to do.”

The magistral would be a lifeline for those citizens shown in the Bregadze photographs, providing modern transportation links, pedestrian infrastructure, greenery, and open passage for installation of electricity, water supply, and sanitation.

The planning team also devised a taxonomy of street sections for the Bakssoviet that covered eight widths and configurations (figure 3.19). All of the dimensions are given in feet, and indeed, the profiles were adapted from US data and precedents. Type I, the widest typical profile, is a 154-foot-wide boulevard that accommodates four lanes of auto traffic, two tram lines, a generous tree-lined pedestrian walkway in the center and ample shaded sidewalks on either side. On the other end of the spectrum is the 56-foot-wide Type VI that holds just three auto lanes, one tree-lined sidewalk, and another narrow unshaded sidewalk (Iur’evskaia, for all of the trouble, came closest to the modest Type VI). Iur’evskaia’s reconstructed profile, roadbed,
and slope were designed to handle tram and bus traffic to bring the neighborhood, finally, into the citywide street network.

Magistrals and secondary streets were widened throughout the urban center of Baku in accordance with a new “red line”—the boundary between the public way
Figure 3.20. Karl Marx Street during reconstruction (left; February 20, 1933) and after reconstruction (right; May 15, 1933). Photos: L. Bregadze. ARDKFSA, Inv. 5-224, 5-223.

Figure 3.21. Gogol Street during reconstruction (left; February 20, 1933) and after reconstruction (right; May 15, 1933). Photos: L. Bregadze. ARDKFSA, Inv. 5-270, 5-349.

and the building plot—such that 1,200–1,300 properties would be “cut” over time. Streets not dimensionally adjusted were nonetheless upgraded with asphalt paving, proper sidewalks, and street trees. Bregadze also captured the process of street modernization (figures 3.20–3.21). In his photos of Karl Marx and Gogol streets, “before” shots from February 1933 show muddy trenches ready for the installation of the concrete water and sewer pipes that lay to the side. On Gogol Street, mounds of discarded cobblestones sit on the obstructed sidewalks, a pile of primitive two-person moving pallets holds the right foreground, and a lonely donkey and cart stand in the middle of the trench. By May 1933, reconstruction was complete. The smooth asphalted surface of the street bed is separated from the asphalted sidewalk by a curb, and street trees and electrical poles sit safely in the pedestrian zone.

Greening the City

Given “the hot climate, the dry and dusty air, the incredible density of construction, and most of all rapid industrial growth . . . city greenery takes on a much greater
degree of importance in Baku than in any other city of the USSR,” Ivanitskii argued. The Baku 1927 Plan’s green spaces—rendered in black on the general plan—included planted boulevards, parks, squares, playgrounds, and sports fields that together served as the lungs of the city to filter particulates and create much-needed shade. Greenery, Ivanitskii stressed, “is important from the perspectives of social health, city improvement and to increase the cultural conditions of life (kul’turnye usloviia zhizni).”

Ivanitskii gathered extensive transnational data on the benefit of plantings to urban residents and stressed that greening was an issue that transcended politics and economics. “Where working masses have a voice in the direction of municipal economics,” he wrote, “they want more plantings closer to houses, to shade playgrounds, and within 500–600 meters from workplaces. Plantings are necessary for life—democratic and proletarian populations value them in the construction of the city.” In capitalist countries the land on which greenery sits has a monetary value that planners have to account for in the project budget, but socialist planners do not have to factor in land costs. They do have to convince the client to leave space free that could otherwise be built on. Ivanitskii argued that green space’s value is qualitative: greenery increases the desirability of all programs that surround it, so in a socialist city plan, greenery must be equitably and regularly distributed. The system of plantings he and his team proposed created an extensive green network that infiltrated all regions of the city (figure 3.22).

In making his case for green Ivanitskii summoned data from European and US sources, most notably a 1923 report from the Pittsburgh Planning Commission. The Pittsburgh report compared open space ratios (green space per capita) for all significant US cities that ran from 5.92 square meters per person in New York City to 51.33 square meters for Washington, DC, with an overall North America average of 12.0 square meters (Baku’s ratio was a paltry 1.8 square meters by comparison). To incite the competitive spirit of Soviet policymakers, Ivanitskii advocated a US-sized ratio of 12.0 square meters for Baku, although 4.2 square meters was the legislated norm in the Russian Republic. The Baku Plan finally settled at a ratio of 6–7 square meters of green space per resident on the regional and the city scale. Ivanitskii also cited the United States for its novel park classification system, which ranged in scale from large regional reserves to local playgrounds for small children. “We have paused on this question—the question of classification of open spaces—because this is not at all the way we work in the USSR,” Ivanitskii wrote in his final report. “But it is well known that such classification plays a great role in general planning and especially the planning of green spaces.” By utilizing standardized modules—street types, park types—the unknowns in a planning project can be limited, Ivanitskii argued. Planning is more rational with typological design, making it easier to calculate and price an equitable spread of green area across territory.

In his discussion of open space cost ramifications, Ivanitskii focused on three US parks for which he had obtained pricing data: Warinanco, Cedar Brook, and Echo Lake Parks. All three were located in greater Elizabeth, New Jersey, and were
Figure 3.22. System of plantings. Baku Plan, 1927. A network of green boulevards connects Baku's park and open space systems. Planners: Aleksandr Ivanitskii et al. RGALI, f.2991, o.1, d.17, l. 62.
designed in 1923 by the Olmsted Brothers landscape architectural firm. Ivanitskii noted that land cost doubled the overall cost in each case, such that the final price tag for Warinanco Park, the largest of the three, was almost $700,000. Lest they be warned off such expenditure, Ivanitskii employed a cunning capitalist argument for his NEP-era clients. “The Americans,” he wrote, “whose wealth of experience with park issues we utilized here, have a saying: ‘Parks pay the city back.’ The Bakuvian saying will be the same, such that in Baku, parks will ‘pay.’”

The 1927 Baku Plan provided exhaustive area calculations in page after page of fold out spreadsheets so that the recommended capital improvements could be accurately priced. Ivanitskii and his team tallied the cost of greening and determined that it was not going to be cheap. “In Baku, this [planting scheme] means a lot of money,” Ivanitskii admitted. Installation of the planting plan would take twenty to twenty-five years, and the Baksovet would expend 250,000–300,000 rubles to make it happen. This was, however, just a small amount more than the city was spending at the time for a noncoordinated collection of street trees and open spaces.

Ratifying the Plan

Once Ivanitskii’s team completed the six critical drawings for the plan, they put their pencils down. Much work remained, however, to describe what had been accomplished. Over the course of 1928, Ivanitskii compiled a massive four-volume report on the project, which was a necessary requirement for the plan’s official approval process. In late 1928, the Baku clients engaged an expert panel of three eminent planners to adjudicate the plan. Professor G. D. Dubelir taught at the Institute of Transportation in Leningrad and was the author of the influential manual *City Planning* (*Planirovka gorodov*, 1910) that first introduced Russian engineers to planning trends in Western Europe and the United States. In the Soviet period, Dubelir specialized in the optimization of road networks in his position as director of the Leningrad and Moscow Highway Institutes. Professor Z. G. Frenkel′ was the author of *The Fundamentals of General Urban Improvements* (*Osnovy obscheogo gorodskogo blagoustroistva*, 1926). Frenkel′ knew Baku well; in his lectures and texts, he cited it as the only city in the Soviet Union with a modern system of daily garbage collection. The third expert panel member, L. A. Il′in, was the chief architect of the city of Leningrad at the time of the expert review, but his influence in Baku was greatest over the long term. Il′in moved to Baku in 1929 shortly after participating in the plan’s adjudication, and over the next few years he adjusted the Ivanitskii plan to meet the new demands of Moscow-influenced ensemble planning. The expert opinion submitted in January 1929 was brief and complimentary. The panel found the project “reasonable and in good faith, in accordance with local physical, geographic, economic, demographic, and social conditions, as well as with the provisions of modern science and the art of urban planning.” In other words,
the Baku Plan managed to be both local and universal; it was tied to the particulars of its site and also in line with international planning standards. The experts ratified a distilled version of Ivanitskii’s report and in so doing they articulated the tasks of Soviet planning. At the fore was the economy. The Baku Plan organized the entire Apsheron Peninsula to accommodate the oil industry, fruitful plots were left free for future exploitation, and proximate housing and services for the oil workers were provided. The plan was also responsive to the limits of the nascent socialist economy. By recommending dense construction and adjustment to the existing fabric instead of destruction, Ivanitskii’s team made the most of restricted capital funding. Lastly, the plan sought to improve urban dwellers’ quality of life through sensitive building orientation and increased greenery. The experts’ final determination was that the plan “should be seen as a general project of redevelopment of the city . . . that can be taken as the basis for the development of working drawings necessary for implementation.”

In January 1930, an entire year after the expert opinion was submitted, and five years after planning work had begun, the Presidium of the Baku Executive District Committee summoned Ivanitskii to Baku to present the plan for official approval. Ivanitskii opened his remarks with gracious acknowledgment of the many collaborators who worked on the plan over the half decade. “This is not an individual work, but a seriously collective work,” he stressed. “I am the one presenting this report formally, but I speak for the whole Baku Department of Communal Services. . . I feel myself to be one of their co-workers—if not forever, at least for the past five years, which is a long period of time. I have stored the whole of Baku in me—in this way Baku is different. I can only say that the interests of Baku have become very close to my heart.” Ivanitskii presented the plan’s chronology and explained the causes of the protracted process. Despite the setbacks, the plan was a tenable long-term proposal for controlled urban growth, and this was the aspect of the project that the executive committee needed to consider and approve. “This is in no way a negative condition to find yourselves in,” Ivanitskii assured his clients. “You should make your desires [for the future] known now, when there are a lot of ideas, a lot of options on the table, when you can be objective, while the project is just one of any number of variants. City planning, which comes to fruition over twenty to forty years, is not impacted by the fact that we are deciding on the plan so far in the future.” Most important, he stressed, the plan required quick ratification. Although Baku was one of the first cities in the Soviet Union to begin a general planning process, it now faced competition from other cities for limited state funding. “To accelerate the implementation of your plan it is necessary to deal with lending credit. I know Tsekombank (the Central Bank of Communal Services and Housing): they would rather give money when they know that the plan is well developed and that no other significant changes are coming.” The stage was set for the executive committee to give the 1927 Baku Plan its stamp of approval.
In the five years between Ivanitskii’s first appearance in Baku and this final one, the balance of power had shifted. Newly acquired knowledge of and experience with the science of city planning empowered the members of the executive committee to interrogate the plan and its planner. The questions they posed ranged from the programmatic to the climatic to the operational. Was Ivanitskii convinced that the stadium was on the optimal site? Why was there no public beach included in the final scheme? On what basis were schools sited on the plan? Was the allocation of 7.5 square meters of green space per person sufficient for decent quality of life in the city? Was the plan in line with anti-aircraft defense measures, and were representatives from the military command consulted as experts? How were Baku’s harsh northerly winds to be mitigated? What did the city need to do to ensure that the plan would be followed? When the barrage of questions tapered, the floor was given back to Ivanitskii.

Speaking off script, the planner addressed the questions one by one with answers that exhibited his breadth of research and deep knowledge of the city. The client group had proven its capacity to absorb the complexity of the planning task, so Ivanitskii did not shy from technical details. He cited international norms from memory and provided statistics where needed. He spoke at length about the characteristics of each of the regions planned in detail and ranked their desirability to justify the phasing for municipal improvements. Ivanitskii also made clear that the plan was not complete. He urged his clients to understand the deliverables as portions of a larger regional plan, yet to be undertaken:

All of Apsheron should be planned, the main highways need to be laid out, and the land must be zoned. We must determine which land will be for military purposes, which will become industrial land, which will be set aside for railways, the port, beaches. Finally, we need to determine where the population will settle, and plan these areas in more detail. This is a giant undertaking but you yourself understand what kind of results it will yield. While in other places planning generalities are sufficient, this little Apsheron Peninsula presents such a valuable territory [for our Union] that we must develop a thorough technical plan.

Although Ivanitskii had insisted from 1925 that the Baku Plan needed to encompass the entire peninsula, the project’s many scheduling and funding setbacks limited the plan’s ultimate scope to the urban core. Professional ethics forbade him from presenting his work as more comprehensive than it was.

Ivanitskii’s answers quelled the committee, whose chair, Frolov, opened the debate and moved to vote on the language of the final resolution. At 10 o’clock at night on January 11, 1930, the Presidium of the Baku Executive District Committee approved the 1927 Baku Plan with three addenda. First, Torgovaia Street would be extended to merge with Gubernskaia. Second, the planning committee was, in the future, to
engage economic issues alongside physical planning issues. Lastly, the Presidium resolved that “the main task of the Planning Committee is to consider measures for the organization of socialist everyday life (byt).” From then on, any adjustment to the space of the city would be judged against its ability to instill suitably socialist habits in Baku’s citizens.

Socialist Urban Theory Arrives in Baku

In all of the archival documentation about housing and planning Baku, from 1920 to 1930, there is sparse mention of socialist ideology. The concerns of Azneft and the Baksovet were practical and immediate. Baku’s growth was dependent on oil, and the city’s importance to the Union fluctuated with its ability to extract this primary resource. Reliable labor was needed to get the oil industry back up and running, so Azneft and the Baksovet built housing, transportation, and limited social services to draw and retain a labor pool. When Ivanitskii arrived in Baku at the end of 1924, he introduced his clients to a more complex set of concerns. Most important, he taught them to conceive of planning as a tool to plot future expansion. Building a single house, or even a whole workers’ settlement like Stepan Razin, was myopic, he stressed. Planning, on the other hand, optimized the overlapping systems of oil, transportation, sanitation, public services, housing, and greenery to make the most of capital expenditures.

Why then, after five years of planning, and at the end of a long ratification meeting, was the relationship of physical planning to socialist ideology suddenly of utmost concern to the Presidium of the Baku Executive District Committee? The final written question submitted to the planner provides context. Ivanitksii read the question aloud to the client group, then offered a curt answer:

Q: You are closely acquainted, no doubt, with the new questions of city building as published in Economic Life (Ekonomicheskaia zhizn’). Namely, shouldn’t we avoid piling ourselves up large cities and instead build small towns for 10,000–15,000 people?

A: This is an issue that keeps coming up. Personally, I think that we are not “piling things up” in this plan but are instead creating a place that will be good for life. Many different organizational patterns are possible that still completely satisfy the demands of socialist byt. Let us end with this.

Socialist city-building kept “coming up,” as Ivanitskii put it, because all of a sudden it was a topic of intense debate in the national press. The questioner referred to Ekonomicheskaia zhizn’ in particular, the daily newspaper published by the Council of Labor and Defense. Starting in December 1929, the newspaper kicked off a regular
series titled “Toward a socialist byt” (Navstrechu sotsialisticheskomu bytu). In more than thirty articles published over the course of that month, economists, architects, and politicians weighed in on the construction of socialist cities that were rising chaotically and poorly planned during the fulfillment of the first Five-Year Plan. The socialist city debates were centered in Moscow. There is no evidence that Ivanitskii played an active role in these discussions, but as a Moscow-based planning practitioner and colleague of some of the most vocal participants, like the Vesnins, he was undoubtedly well versed in the main points of the debate. The Baku Executive District Committee’s concern was that the project they were about to adjudicate might not align with emerging trends in socialist city planning.72

Before the vote on his plan, Ivanitskii requested the opportunity to offer a conclusion on the “ideological status of the socialist city.” He opened with an exegesis of the Moscow debates. There were two prevailing concepts for the socialist city that were diametrically opposed to one another, he explained. One concept, the brainchild of the economist Leonid Sabsovich, proposed a city with socialist infrastructure and byt consisting of large residential buildings—house-communes (doma-kommuny)—with separate units for each of the 2,000–2,500 residents. The private rooms in the doma-kommuny were of minimal dimensions, to be used for rest, sleep, and intimate relations only. All other daily activities would take place in public institutions embedded in the building. The second socialist city concept, promoted by the sociologist Mikhail Okhitovich, proposed single-room, individual houses strung linearly through open territory. “If the other city [Sabsovich’s] had an expression of vertical volume, this one [Okhitovich’s] has a horizontal volume,” Ivanitskii explained. They both derived from the same principle of the full socialization of byt and total socialist organization, but they arrived at different conclusions regarding the form of residential buildings, and following this, the project of the city plan.73 In the official transcript for the meeting, the surnames of both socialist city protagonists are misspelled, as “Sapsovich” and “Akhotovich,” and none of the signatories to the minutes caught the mistakes. Socialist city ideas may have circulated among the Baku administration, but the particulars were fuzzy at best.

Ivanitskii divided his analysis of these concepts into two categories: issues emerging from unresolved population caps and those having to do with block size. His population critique was aimed directly at Sabsovich, whose outside limit for a socialist city unit was set at 50,000 residents. Ivanitskii used the socialist city at Zaporizhzhia, near the massive Dnipro Hydroelectric Station, as an example of how difficult population caps would be to institute in practice. In Zaporizhzhia, planners designated an initial population for the city at 250,000–300,000 with predicted urban growth at 500,000–600,000 residents. “But if you stop at a city plan for 50,000 residents, then the work required to run a huge energy station is complicated by artificially fragmenting the population and forcing them into groups of small cities,” Ivanitskii argued. “This may even be contrary to the necessities of a healthy economy.”74 By raising the specter of economy, Ivanitskii spoke directly to the concerns of the assembled.
If Baku’s workforce was forcibly fragmented into population-capped housing combines, municipal transportation would need to expand yet again. In the Sabsovich scheme, the city would also be required to provide potentially redundant public services for each urban unit. Ivanitskii noted that he had discussed with Sabsovich personally these and other issues prompted by forced urban fragmentation, but that the economist could not answer the concerns satisfactorily. Okhitovich’s theory, architecturalized into diffuse single-room pavilions set in the landscape by Moisei Ginzburg, “has had unfavorable results in terms of the sanitary-technical systems,” Ivanitskii told the group, “because to install a sewer in a city which consists of individual rooms is a task that simply cannot be solved.”

In closing, Ivanitskii sympathized with the members of the committee before him who were tasked to choose a system for urban organization but who were faced with “undeveloped schemes on which the highest party and state echelons, specifically Gosplan, has not even yet made their own judgment.” Common frustration with the nebulous, evolving goals of Soviet city planning united the planner and his clients in their final meeting. It was a frustration echoed in all corners of the USSR during the 1929–30 building season. Theoretical ground continued to shift while construction targets for the first Five-Year Plan loomed.

The process by which Baku was planned is an example of design praxis *par excellence.* The planning team began with intense research on the city’s morphology, economy, demography, and social and cultural practices. They then moved on to draft designs and final recommendations. Two years separated the completion of deliverables from the plan’s final ratification, ample time for Ivanitskii to synthesize the effort’s most important takeaways—to turn practice into theory. Spatial preoccupations and solutions that became hallmarks of socialist planning were brought to light and pushed forward in the Baku 1927 Plan. First, the plan advocated regionalism. Both planner and client recognized the entire Apsheron Peninsula as the proper scope of planning work for the city of Baku. Second, housing and industry were acknowledged as inextricable. Worker settlements, the first priority of the Baku Plan, were located proximate to, but not on top of, valuable oil-bearing lands. Hundreds of units of worker housing—though still not nearly enough—were designed and constructed with hygienic economy. Third, linkages across urban space and into the periphery were highlighted as crucial. Long clear lines of communication—magistrals—were inscribed on the city to connect neighborhoods previously divided by topography, density, and distance. Four, public institutions and services were evenly distributed throughout the plan and acted as local centers of gravity. Finally, a planting plan was instituted to bring quality of life to the dusty city and provide spaces for public leisure.

The story of the Baku Plan confounds one of the most stubborn assumptions about Soviet planning: that it was, from the start, administratively and geographically centralized. In its period of inception, from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s, Soviet planning benefitted from the absence of central direction, and from an open
dialogue with a community of experts inside and outside of the Soviet Union, both distinctive features of NEP. The Baku planning effort was not driven by the demands of the state apparatus in Moscow, nor was it administered by a state entity in the Soviet capital. Planner Aleksandr Ivanitskii was a private practitioner hired by a local administration, and together client and contractor devised the planning tasks with little to no oversight from Gosplan, the state planning body. As such, the 1927 Baku Plan represents a period of revolutionary experimentation in Soviet spatial planning that, despite later centralization, left a significant legacy. This locally grounded effort produced a plan that stood the test of time and the vagaries of style. The 1927 Baku Plan effectively shaped the rational growth of the city in the decades to follow and provided a practical guide for socialist planning after the 1929–30 socialist urbanism debates had run their course.