



## SPECIAL ASPECTS OF METROPOLITAN AREA (BASED ON THE MATERIAL OF THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL EVOLUTION OF THE CITY OF NUR-SULTAN)

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### ABSTRACT

The strategic aim lies in coming to a decision on the specific and particular characteristics of the historical and cultural development of *Nur-Sultan* city. A range of traditional general scientific research methods has been used. They are analytical, synthetic and comparative. Among other things, the author refers to statistical data that reflect socially significant development processes of the city, which is currently called *Nur-Sultan*. The article's observation can be summarized in the following context. Sociocultural dynamics in the context of the transformation (renaming) of cities in *Akmolinsk – Tselinograd – Akmola – Astana – Nur-Sultan* system is taken into consideration. The statement is substantiated that the very dynamics of the city's growth in question was evolutionary, consistent, systemic in nature. The remarkable thing is that in the spring of 1961 a new city appeared on the map of the USSR: *Akmolinsk* was renamed *Tselinograd*. In reality, a relatively small city has become the centre of the virgin lands region, the heart of the project for the all-Union development of virgin lands (North Kazakhstan and South Siberia). There is a description of the period, relatively short, but certainly significant in the context of the outlined thematic field, when the analyzed city was called *Akmola*. It has been stated that there is a task-oriented successive vector of the public support, which has been provided to the city over the course of decades. The emphasis is put on the importance of political will and perseverance in giving *Akmola*, *Astana*, and then *Nur-Sultan* not only the nominal status of a capital, but also the actual position of the city, which is

of fundamental importance for the socio-political, cultural, economic growth of the whole Kazakhstan. Succession and consistency are two basic factors that made a small settlement of the nineteenth century *Akmolinsk* a capital city of Nur-Sultan at the end of the first twenty years of the 21st century.

## INTRODUCTION

Timeliness of the topic. Kazakhstan's declaration of state independence has become a new historic period in the country's life. The initial period of a sovereign state in the 90s of the last century coincided with the time of drastic transformations of economic, political and social relations, these were ... *special years in the heat of passions and emotions. These were the years when the most important decisions were made, on which the further path of development of our state depended, when one wrong decision could significantly change the course of the country's movement*, noted the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev. One of the most important events of this period is the capital city's transfer.

The strategic initiative to create a new capital belongs to the First President of Kazakhstan and was put forward by him in the first years of independence, in 1992. *At that point in time the fundamentals of the present, and a number of geostrategic factors brought us to take a new approach to the process of forming our own geopolitical space*. In 1994, the meeting of the Supreme Council of Kazakhstan, the idea of transferring the capital was officially announced for the first time, which resulted in adopting the Resolution *On Transfer of the Capital of Kazakhstan* by the country's deputies.

A sizable portion of documents recreating the historical retrospective of the transfer of the capital of modern Kazakhstan is in the National Archive of Kazakhstan. The full use of this informative content allows not only to recreate the history of events, but also to convey the true atmosphere of the historical era. Thus, the documents of the Office of the President and the Cabinet of Ministers of Kazakhstan (Ф.43) *The State Commission of Kazakhstan on Relocation of Higher and Central Government Agencies to the City of Akmola* (created by Presidential Decree of September 15, 1995) are of particular importance to researchers.<sup>1</sup>

The modern capital of Kazakhstan – situated on the banks of the River Ishim- the millionaire Nur-Sultan city is objectively the country's socio-economic, political, cultural centre.

Along with that, this situation is determined by significant historical and cultural dynamics, systemic processes of development: modern Nur-Sultan is the successor of the experience that was formed in the context of evolution, which, in turn, depends on some basic *points, nuclear components*. We are talking about the historical and cultural dynamics that are associated with such stages of the city's development as its transformation in *Akmolinsk–Tselinograd–Astana–Nur–Sultan* system.

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<sup>1</sup> National Archive of Kazakhstan (Ф. 43).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

We are using traditional methods in the framework of this material, which is analytical in nature: analytical, synthetic and comparative. In addition, we turn to statistical data that reflect socially significant processes of the city's growth, which is currently called *Nur-Sultan*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the course of actualizing the research, the objective insufficiency of scientific work was revealed that would directly or indirectly affect the dynamics (cultural, socio-economic, socio-political, etc.) of the city, which is currently called *Nur-Sultan*, is the capital of independent modern Kazakhstan.

However, the city's improvement, as well as architecture, are the most important elements of urban culture; they largely determined and acted as indicators of its growth.<sup>2</sup> The material<sup>3</sup>, the author of which is E. Sadovskaya, is very significant in this context.

Let's quote some points translated into the study of this author.

In December 1997, the capital of Kazakhstan was moved from Alma-Ata to Akmola, a regional city in the centre of the republic. By the mid-1990s, Akmola was an industrial and transport, scientific, educational and cultural centre of regional significance, but the infrastructure of the city did not correspond to the new capital status and required significant development.

The capital's transfer is a unique phenomenon in the history of post-Soviet states and has its own specific reasons. The decision to transfer the capital was made by the Supreme Council of Kazakhstan on July 6, 1994. The official reason for the transfer was that Alma-Ata was geographically located in the south and not in the centre of the republic, that it had exhausted the possibilities of its further development and became dangerous in environmental and seismic terms; the southern capital is indeed located in a seismogenic area, where destructive earthquakes can occur.

The real reasons for the capital city's transfer were geopolitical, or rather, ethno political, and consisted of a kind of split in Kazakhstan into the Russian-speaking industrial north and the Kazakh agrarian south. In 1989, 45-65% of Russians and 17 to 28% of Kazakhs lived in East Kazakhstan, Karaganda, Kustanai, Akmola (Tselinograd) regions. For example, more than 1 million people lived in Akmola region during this period, of which 448 thousand or 44.7% of Russians, 123.7 thousand or 12.3% of Germans, 94.4 thousand or 9.4% of Ukrainians, 28,7 thousand or 2.8% of Belarusians. The Kazakh population in the region was 224.8 thousand people, or 22.4%.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> G. Alpysbaeva. *Akmola, Tselinograd, Astana: Historical Way of Formation and Development*

<sup>3</sup> Ye. Sadovskaya. *Migration in Kazakhstan at the turn of XXI c.: Main Trend and Perspective View*. Alma-Ata, 2001, p. 42-48.

Analyzing the city's development stages, when it was named Astana, the author raises the following issues: the role of Astana in the general urban processes taking place in the country.

The author, being consistent, formulates the following.

There are 84 cities in Kazakhstan, two of which are Astana and Alma-Ata, of national significance. Of 84 cities, 21 are large, with a population of 100 or more thousand people, 63 are medium and small cities, with a population of 100 to 10 thousand people.

For almost ten years, the process of de-urbanization has been ongoing in Kazakhstan, i.e. population decline in cities. The share of urban population in the country in 1991 was 57.3%, and in 2000 - 55.9%. In connection with the economic crisis, the closure of major industries and intensive emigration, the decline of small cities continues, the transition of the latter to the category of depressed ones, and stagnation mainly takes place in the regional centres. Against this background, Astana is the only example of the city's intensive development through the acquisition of a new status and large financial injections.

A comparison of migration trends in the 'two capitals' - Astana and Alma-Ata, shows that against the backdrop of eight years of de-urbanization, two capitals - the current and the former - remain the most attractive for migrants, both in terms of economic prospects and access to cultural achievements, opportunities for professional growth, etc. Alma-Ata, due to the already accumulated economic and socio-cultural potential, remains attractive for the population of the whole country, but primarily the southern region, and Astana - mainly for residents of the northern and central regions.

Thus, while achieving the ethno-demographic balance and stimulating the migration of Kazakhs from south to north were one of the main goals of moving the capital city, this goal has not yet been achieved. The number of Kazakhs involved in interregional migration in Kazakhstan is 0.7% of their total number in the country. If we take into account intraregional migration, the share of Kazakhs participating in intra-republican migration will be 1.5%. Before now, the change in the population, including various ethnic groups, in Astana was mainly due to the intensive emigration of Slavic peoples and Germans. However, the involvement of Kazakhs in migration to Astana and the predominance of the indigenous population in inter-regional exchange is running high, and this can be interpreted as a steady tendency. Aiming at building a nation state and the political dominance of a titular nation allow for the ethno-demographic component of the population as a whole throughout the country and in the metropolitan region, in particular, to change in favor of the Kazakh ethnic group.

## RESULTS

Let us analyze the main phases of the historical and cultural history of the city of Nur-Sultan by series.

*Akmolinsk* is a city with the fundamental history of its origin, progress and expansion. At the same time, October 21, 1868 can be called a

conceptually significant date: on this day, according to the relevant Decree, the Akmola region was set apart within clear boundaries, with its centre being the regional city of Akmola.

At the same time, from 1858 to 1868, Akmola was treated as the centre being the part of the Siberian Kyrgyz, Akmola district. The city in the outlined fixed period was a relatively small population settlement. So, according to the census of 1897, its population was 9707 people. Speaking about the national composition, we note the three most significant groups: 47, 58% were Russians, a little more than 30% (31.11% more precisely) were Kazakhs, and about 11% were Tatars. At the same time, in *Akmola uyezd*, according to the data of some certain source, 89.9% were Kazakhs and about 5% - Russians.

Thus, Akmolinsk can be defined as a city that has become the basis for the concentration of a diverse resource base around it, and the emergence of urbanization processes. The city of Akmolinsk retained its status as the central agglomeration of the region during the significant period of Soviet power. However, the sociopolitical processes that began in the 1960s specified different realities in a quality manner, which Akmolinsk had to comply with as a new name.

In the spring of 1961 (March 20, 1961) a new city appeared on the map of the USSR: Akmolinsk was renamed Tselinograd. In fact, a relatively small city has become the centre of the *Tselinny area*, the core of the project for the all-Union development of virgin lands (North Kazakhstan and South Siberia).

This kind of relevance - Tselinograd was positioned and typified as the centre of perspective with the view of developing new bedrocks and providing the country with grain - fundamentally changed its current status. One can phrase it the following: Tselinograd received a crucial impetus. Some of its motive power was *Tselinselmash* industrial community (*IIO*), which was the largest agricultural machinery manufacturing plant in the area. The activity of *Kazakhselemash* enterprise was also significant, and its production substantially covered the need for agricultural machines capable of functioning in areas subject to wind erosion.

It should be noted that the city population has increased significantly: in the 1960s, the number of Tselinograd residents exceeded the threshold of one hundred thousand people of fundamental importance.

The expansion of production processes required corresponding dynamics in the context of the population's social security. Therefore, the very beginning of the 1960s is marked by implementing the significant project for its time (G. Ya. Gladstein, the author) to construct new residential areas. New residential areas were erected in a short time in the previously undeveloped areas of the south-eastern part of the city, with the centerpiece of which were standard designs of high-rise residential buildings. In fact, the social and domestic infrastructure was built in the early 1960s, which became a fundamental pivot in the further development of the city.

We also note that the de facto all-Union significance of the virgin lands development project and the dynamics of Tselinograd's progress due to it inspired the need to erect objects of a *cultural* property in the city.

In the 1960 and 1970 timeframe, the city built its own TV centre and the *Ishim* Hotel (at present turned into the *Grand Park Esil*). Let us also mention the project to build the *Youth House*, implemented in 1974, as well as the *Palace of Virgin Land Explorers*, built in the mid-1960s, which later became the *Palace of Culture*, and today it has been converted into the *Congress Hall* building, being important for the city. However, relatively short (from July 6, 1992 to May 6, 1998) is the period when the city was called *Akmola*; but at the same time it became unconditionally significant in the context of the research field of this article. It is a common fact the etymology of this name is not clear in a way that does not allow an invariant interpretation. *White Grave*, *White Shrine*, *White Abundance* are the main versions for the appearance of a capacious sonorous name of the city.

It was Akmola that became the capital of the independent Republic of Kazakhstan: it has been determined by the decree of the Supreme Council of Kazakhstan dated December 10, 1994, according to which the actual transfer of the capital from the city of Almaty took place.

The final decree on the capital city's transfer was made by the Head of State at the end of 1997, and in a little more than six months (June 10, 1998) Akmola received the equivalent international representation.

Considering the petitions of local executive and representative bodies, the wishes of Akmola city public and based on the conclusion of the State Onomastic Commission under the Government of Kazakhstan, Akmola receives a new sonorous name - Astana. As you know, the corresponding place name literally means capital and a capital city. The decree on renaming the nation's capital was signed by the Head of State on May 6, 1998 and the city's crucial life stage began, which in 1998 received (by UNESCO decision) the status of city of the world. According to official figures, the population of the capital exceeded the milestone of one million inhabitants at the turn of 2017 - 2018, while about 80% are Kazakhs, that is, the titular nation of the state. The second indicator is Russians, which occupy just over 13 percentage points.

## DISCUSSIONS

The metropolitan status has become the factor that led to many systemic processes and impulses for the urban development. Let's outline them from the point of view of the following points.

- A special economic zone being organized to become one of the drivers of socio-economic, socio-political and cultural development of both the city itself and the metropolitan area.
- Significant positive dynamics in the city's population: it grew from 270,000 to 700,000 people during fifteen years (from 1996 to 2011). An administrative and business center was erected, as well as, what is important, an appropriate social and domestic infrastructure. In the

outlined period of time, the area of the city exceeded 700 square kilometers.

- The population concentration process in the capital city brought about its rapid development, the dynamics that, for example, allowed Astana to host the 7th Asian Winter Games (2011), as well as the world-famous EXPO-2017, international specialized exhibition (2017).

- The main industries on which depended and depend the city's economy are trade, transport, communications, and house building. The centerpieces of the city's industrial production are such industries as manufacturing of building materials, foodstuffs and alimentary products, engineering.

The analytical excursion *Historical and Cultural Evolution of Nur-Sultan City as Object of Disciplinary Space of Culture* will be complete in case of characterizing the 'latest' history of the city, that is, those processes that take place starting March 23, 2019.

As is commonly known, the flow of domestic policy process in Kazakhstan, the change of the Head of State - all this led to renaming Astana into Nur-Sultan. Some legal processes for registering a new city name ended amid this spring.

*Nur-Sultan* appears on the map of Kazakhstan.

At present it is a city that is the second-biggest (after Almaty) in the context of contributing the gross product of the trade sector of the entire national economy. In terms of retail turnover, Nur-Sultan also confidently maintains the second position in Kazakhstan.

The city of Nur-Sultan is the construction leader in the country. Note that this situation has the relevant basis: in 2009, one fifth of all residential real estate commissioned for operation in Kazakhstan accounted for the capital city. Over a number of years, the big city has been the absolute leader in the volume of residential buildings' commissioning. Let us summarize what has been said before.

Firstly, it should not go without mention the enormous significance of the historical and cultural context, which depends on the succession in the system of renaming the city under examination, giving it the metropolitan status.

Continuity and consistency are two basic factors that made a small settlement of the nineteenth century *Akmolinsk* the capital city of Nur-Sultan at the end of the first twenty years of the twenty-first century.

Economic, political developments, high ground decisions of national leaders, challenging creative work of the population - the basis for the progress of the capital in particular and the metropolitan area as a whole. Secondly, the very dynamics of the city's growth in question was evolutionary, consistent and systemic. In addition, for example, in the mid-twentieth century, the added momentum for the metropolitan's development was inspired by the role that the associated region began to play in the economic context of the entire USSR.

Thirdly, the city's multinationalism, while maintaining the pivotal importance of the titular nation, determines the maintenance and development of the positive social climate in the city and region, which,

in turn, acts as a factor of investment attractiveness of the entire national economy of Kazakhstan.

Fourthly, there is a deliberate and consistent vector of government support that has been provided to the city for decades.

### ***Conclusive Statement***

The political willpower and perseverance are beyond doubt in giving Akmola, Astana, and then Nur-Sultan not only the nominal status, but also the actual position of the city, which is of fundamental importance for the socio-political, cultural, economic development of all Kazakhstan.

Currently, Nur-Sultan is not just a capital city, the centre of the state, but a city that is consistently developing both from the point of view of the economy and from the social and cultural standpoint. Initially, the city, founded in 1830 as a Cossack settlement, was called *Akmolinsk*. It was renamed Tselinograd in 1961. In 1992-1998 the city was called Akmola. In December 1997, at the initiative of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the capital of Kazakhstan was moved from Almaty to Akmola, which in May 1998 was renamed Astana (translated from the Kazakh language as 'capital'). *Nursultan* is a compound name. From Arabic it is translated as 'nur' – 'radiance, light' and 'sultan' – 'ruler, imperious'.<sup>5</sup>

What calls attention to itself is the relative simultaneity of the metropolitan area development, which consolidates the industrial growth, the financial and business centre, on the one hand, and, what is critical, the facilities of the social and domestic cultural environment, on the other.

What's in store for the cultural, socio-political, economic, urbanistic growth of the modern capital of Kazakhstan?

In our view, the capital city of the country will develop as a significant urban centre, while some natural (long-standing) duality in *Almaty - Nur-Sultan* system will be kept.

This dualism, which has many basic historical, political and sociocultural foundations, will achieve promising goals and objectives. Firstly, there will be implementation of a systematic process of differentiation of a diverse resource base.

Secondly, the processes of urbanization and urban development will actively continue to expand.

Thirdly, as a matter of course, there will be natural significant social and cultural competition between the largest cities of Kazakhstan.

Fourthly, the dynamics, movement and distribution of labor resources will be optimized. This, in turn, will make the practice of achieving a balance of the country's labor potential as efficient as possible.

In summary, Nur-Sultan is a city with an enormous historical and cultural foundation, the history and continuity that makes up the groundwork and basis for its long-term growth.

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<sup>5</sup> URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/655438>. Available at: October 1, 2019



From our point of view, Nur-Sultan is armed with all the potentials to remain a city that meets its capital status to the full extent. At the same time - what is happening today - the distribution of economic and labor resources between the leading (largest) cities of Kazakhstan can be considered as some additional competitive factor, momentum, affecting the entire national economy.

We have a theory that the actual authorities of Kazakhstan are armed with the whole variety of resources, instruments and practical political management mechanisms that can and should be used for the development of both the capital of the country itself and the metropolitan area as a whole in a consistent manner.

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