

Creating images: changes in real and virtual imaginary of Hrodna through the 20th – beginning of the 21st century

Even with eyes protected by the green spectacles, Dorothy and her friends were at first dazzled by the brilliancy of the wonderful City. The streets were lined with beautiful houses all built of green marble and studded everywhere with sparkling emeralds. They walked over a pavement of the same green marble, and where the blocks were joined together were rows of emeralds, set closely, and glittering in the brightness of the sun. The window panes were of green glass; even the sky above the City had a green tint, and the rays of the sun were green.

There were many people – men, women, and children – walking about, and these were all dressed in green clothes and had greenish skins.

(L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*)

The aim of this paper is to compare creations of images of a city through the 20th-21st centuries by the example of an old Belarusian city Hrodna in the West Belarus. Understanding a city as an example of semiosphera¹, an object of analyze will be an architectural shape of a city² as well as a text describing a city³.

Dividing this time interval into 4 periods, I'd like to compare changes in physical and mental topographies of the city analyzing city's plans and presentations of it in guidebooks and albums. The periods are: 1) 1918-1939 – Hrodna in the Polish state, 2) 1944-1987 – Soviet period, 3) 1987-1994 – Perestroyka and Independent Belarus, 4) 1995-nowadays – the latest history. Every change of regime tried to create a new urban reality and used different mechanisms to gain this aim.

The following aspects will be analyzed: 1) in “real sphere”: topographical structure of the city (changing of disposition of streets and squares), architecture of the city (the main dominants, their appearance), monuments, 2) in “virtual sphere”: city icons (the main objects that represent the city in guidebooks), architectural dominants (other frequent architectural representations), verbal images and characteristics of the city, 3) relations between “real” and “virtual” images.

Material chosen to analyze imaginary of Hrodna is guidebooks and photo-albums made by Hrodna authors as it is the most representative instrument of creation of stereotypes for city-dwellers and tourists and it usually reflects an “official” image of the city.

¹ Лотман Ю.М., *Семіосфера*, СПб, 2004, с. 250-335.

² U. Eco, *Semiologia architektury // Nieobecna struktura*, Warszawa, 2003, s. 197-255.

³ Топоров В.Н., *Петербургский текст русской литературы*, СПб, 2003.

1. Polish city – restoration and historical research

The interwar period was a time of state and national determination for the lands of Eastern Europe. After attempts of organizing the Independent Belarusian State the territory of Belarus was divided into two parts and belonged to two different states: Poland (the II Republic of Poland) and BSSR. Hrodna found itself in Poland. The newly organized Polish state worked on forming its identity and ideology. Proclaiming restoration of Res Publica Polonia – Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth – it engaged in study of history (of country and localities) and reconstruction of urban elements that would emphasize history of Res Publica.

During this period the first archeological excavations were made in Hrodna, there were prepared projects of reconstruction of the Old Castle (Palace of Stephan Batory), the first books of Hrodna history appeared (researches made by J. Jodkowski), the Museum of local lore was established.

Topographically there were no large-scale changes in the city space. Elements of Russian intrusion were thoroughly abolished. In place of an Orthodox church built within an architectural complex of Haradnica in 1860-s, the monument of Freedom (a bald eagle – symbol of Poland) was erected. The parochial church in the city square (Fara Vitauta), which was originally Catholic, but rebuilt in 19th century as an Orthodox (with typical “onion” cupola), was redesigned as Catholic in Neo-gothic style. Though Orthodox churches were also restored. The oldest Kalozha church (12th c.) that was half wrecked by the river in 1853 was provisionally rebuilt in 1934-1939 (the first restoration was in 1889-1911). Remains of another medieval Orthodox church founded in excavations in Old Castle yard were surrounded by protective constructions.

The first guide and popular historical books were edited in the interwar period⁴. The city is called there “advanced in age” (J.Jodkowski, 1923, p. [3]), “one of the oldest city in the North-East of Poland” (*Grodno i okolice*, 1934, p. 3), “the capital of an knighthood” (Ibidem, p. 4), “center of a region”, “of a province” (Ibidem, p. 4), “the favorite place of residence of great dukes of Lithuania, and later of kings of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth” (Ibidem, p. 5), “a place where parliaments were hold” (Ibidem, p. 5). So its antiquity and political position in Res Publica Polonia were emphasized.

These guidebooks present mainly historical places of the city, they say broadly about their meanings, present photos of some of them. The first photos of *Grodno i okolice* are panorama of Hrodna (with Jesuits’ and Minorites’ (Bernardines’) churches, Old and New Castles, a watch-tower as dominants), and a palace of Stephan Batory. *Grodno*, made by pupils of gymnasium, starts with Kalozha church photo. On other pictures in the books there are churches in the city square, the wooden

⁴ *Grodno i okolice. Jeziora Augustowskie. Suwalszczyzna: Przewodnik turystyczny*, Grodno, 1934. *Grodno* / wyd. Kółko historyczne przy 1-em Społecznym Gimnazjum koedukacyjnym, Grodno, 1934, 97 s. Józef Jodkowski, *Grodno*, Wilno, 1923, 120 s.: 28 ill. Mieczysław Orłowicz, *Przewodnik ilustrowany po wojewodztwie Białostockim: z ilustracjami, planami i mapami*, Białystok, 1937, 477 s.

lamus of 17th c., the monument to E. Orzeszko, Kalozha church, the Old Castle, Jesuits' church, palace of A. Tyzenhaus, house of E. Orzeszko, J. Pilsudski on the Old Castle yard, Synagogues. *Grodno*, written by J. Jodkowski (1923), contains pictures of panoramic view (3), catholic churches and cloisters (11), Kalozha church (4), Royal Castles (4), synagogue (1), buildings and palaces (3), persons (2), a city seal (1).

So, the guidebooks present old sacred and secular buildings, panoramic views of the city. The dominant representations are the churches in the city square, the Castles, Kalozha church. They represent political meaning of the city, its multicultural character, emphasize its old history.

We can say that the icon of Hrodna in that period was Kalozha church or the Old Castle. They were used the most often as representation of Hrodna. Kalozha church was a symbol of antiquity of the city, its uniqueness; the Old Castle represented residential and parliament functions of Hrodna, said about its greatness.

2. **Soviet city**

Being rebuilt after the II World War Hrodna was formed in a convention of a modern Soviet city with developed industry and social service.

In this period the area and population of the city grows extremely. In the prewar period the population of Hrodna averaged 49.000, after the War it was less than half of it, in 1959 it amounted 72.900, in 1970 – 132.500, in 1979 – 195.000. The area has increased several times. New modern industrial and residential districts appear. But I'd like to focus on the central part of the city – its historical core – to see the way how it was developed.

The most important in organizing the urban space was to create a city square, which would conform to the new political situation. The old market square was rebuilt in 1950-60-s: it was enlarged because the City hall, palace of Radziwills, and some houses were destructed during the War and not rebuilt afterwards; the Parochial church was detonated in 1961. "Palace of culture" of textile-workers was built in the Western part of the square in 1958, a classicistic building with huge staircase in front of it, appropriate for organizing a place for presidium in parades. Hotel "Neman" was built in the Eastern part in 1961. (This square was also used as a parade square before, but buildings of the churches served as focus points. That's why the Parochial church was rebuilt after every change of regime, until it was not destroyed completely as it was mentioned). Dimensions of the Soviet square decreased optically the Jesuits church (an absolute dominant before), transforming it into one of a series of buildings of the square along with the Palace of culture.

At the same time another square is being organized in Hrodna. As early as 1949 Lenin monument was erected in the other side of Sovetskaya street and the Lenin square was originated. (Historically this part of the city never pretended to be a center, though at the end of 18th century a new modern district Haradnica was established here, and the palace of A. Tyzenhaus, contemporary city head, formed an architectural ensemble and was used as a cultural center for the city. Architectural

complex of palaces and schools was used as framing for the newly organized square). In 1970-s the new square was enlarged, in 1987 it “was modernized, planned for holding manifestation and other mass festivals, it became an administrative and public center of the city”⁵. Indeed, the area of the Lenin square was enlarged a few times after 1970-s. City and oblast halls became the only dominants here. A new monument to Lenin marked the new center of Hrodna (Now the zero kilometer stone stands in the Lenin square).

Another way of inculcation of Soviet symbols was making monuments and memorial tablets. Actually in the pre-Soviet Hrodna there were only monuments inside Churches (to Stanislaw August Poniatowski, Stephan Batory, Antony Tyzenhauz, portraits of benefactors, tablets to people buried in churches), monuments on cemeteries, allegorical or heraldic figures in front of palaces. The first “city monuments” were placed in the interwar period, and they were the Monument to Freedom (mentioned above) and a monument to Eliza Orzeszko (which was transported to cemetery during the II World War). The Soviet period starts to use actively this form of commemoration. Monuments to different figures of the Revolution, revolutionary struggling of 19th c., heroes of the II World War appeared year after year in all the kind of public spaces.

The city and its history... This history is in the names of its streets and avenues, boulevards and squares, in the numerous monuments and obelisks and memorial tombstones and plaques, in the sacred earth of the Mound of Glory⁶.

It should be noted that monuments were placed in all the important places of the old city if those were destroyed. For example, in the place of old Palace of Tyzenhauz, destroyed in the I World War, a monument to the Unknown Warrior was put and common grave was organized, in the place of the former Dominican Church a monument to marshal Sokolovsky. So that some time significant places obtained new semantic meaning.

These were the most important changes in the material sphere of the city in the Soviet period, I believe. Of course, buildings destroyed during the war were not rebuilt. But physically historical Hrodna remained a city of narrow streets and 19th century buildings. There were organized only 2 modern squares in the center of the city, and there were built some new buildings in place of the destroyed ones. The most influential activity was rearranging the city sphere in the minds of people, and erection of monuments was a part of its process.

Building a totally new Hrodna in virtual reality is well seen in the albums, guidebooks, postcards of that period⁷.

⁵ *Гродно: энциклопедический справочник*, Мн, 1989, с. 252.

⁶ *Гродно* / тэкст да альбома І.А. Калюты, фота У.І. Мяжэвіча, У.М.Гофмана, В.П.Косціна і інш., Мн., 1975, л. 47.

⁷ The following guidebooks will be analyzed: *Гродна, Гродно, Grodno*/ тэкст да альбома І.А. Калюты, фота У.І. Мяжэвіча, У.М.Гофмана, В.П.Косціна і інш., Мн.: "Беларусь", 1975, 47 л.: 39 іл.; *Гродненская область, Белорусская ССР* / под ред. Л.Г.Клецкова, Е.Е.Емельяновой, А.В. Богуша, Мн.: Беларусь, 1976, 222 с.: илл.; *Прынямонне – край родны* / тэкст І.С.Грableўскі, фота А.М.Коласаў, Г.В.Гулеўскі, Мн.: Беларусь, 1981, [160] с.:илл.; *Гродно. Grodno* / текст И.И.Ковкель, Я.Н.Мараш, художник А. Шуплецов, фото Г.Л. Лихтаровича,Мн.: Полюмя, 1987, 95 с.: илл.

A “kings’ town”, “parliament’s town” changes into a “new town” (*Hrodna*, 1975), “young industrial city”, “modern industrialized and cultural center” (*Grodnienskaya oblast*, 1976), that has an “industrial appearance” (*Ibidem*). Though, it is mentioned that the city is old and modern at one time (“ancient town, new town” (*Ibidem*)), but it is renewed over and over, and its youthfulness became the most determinant characteristic of Hrodna.

These changes in character of the city had to become apparent in its look.

Not long ago a person that approaches the city would see cupola of orthodox and catholic churches dominating over the city panorama, but nowadays works of today’s generations are brought to the forefront. A TV-tower, high-rise residential and administrative buildings, factories and plants create appearance of Hrodna ...⁸

What are the mental dominants of city’s area? Which places of Hrodna are the most frequent in albums? Texts and photos of the albums present first of all Lenin square, Sovetskaya street. Most images contain broad streets, high-rise buildings, and factories. As a part of historical aspect of old Hrodna Kalozha can appear or Pakrousky Cathedral (built in 1906-1910). There are no mentionings of the Royal Castles in the city; catholic churches are very rare in books. Very interesting is the way how catholic churches are presented in text. “*Pryniamonnie – kray rodny*”, edited in 1976 by city’s authorities, lists the Castle hill, the Lower church, Kalozha church, and “catholic churches in baroque style – one, that is situated in Paris commune str. (erected in 1595), another in K.Marx str. (1647) etc. There are also some interesting buildings of later epochs” (1976).

Album of Kaluta (*Hrodna*, 1975) names in the introduction the following buildings: Kalozha church (twice), the Old Castle, “building of Russian drama theatre” (Tyzenhauz theatre) (twice), the memorial estate of E. Orzeszko, a prison, a house where revolutionary committee met, a house, where Dzierzynski stayed for one night, the “Azot” factory.

Events that constitute the history of Hrodna are the following, according to the same album: Mongols and Tatars invasion (though it never happened to Hrodna), crusaders invasion, war with the Swedes (18th c.), war with Napoleon, and then a lot of events connected with the Revolution and the II World war.

The names listed in the article are: Peter the Great, Denis Davydoff, Kastus Kalinousky, Uladzimir Urubleusky, and revolutionary and II World War heroes.

This list of events, names, buildings is common for all the guidebooks of the period (it remains the same even till the end of 1980-s). The events are of the most importance for history of Moscovia and Russia. The name of K. Kalinousky appears as a follower of Gertzen, Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov; U. Urubleusky as a friend of Marx and Engels. There are no mentions of places, buildings, events, and persons important for history of the city itself or connected with the history of

⁸ *Гродненская область, Белорусская ССР, Мн., 1976, с. 102.*

Great Duchy of Lithuania, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Independent Belarus (except K. Kalinousky and U. Urubleusky, sometimes also E. Orzeszko appears).

Even an album edited in 1987 (I.I. Kovkel) says nothing about kings that lived in Hrodna and parliaments hold in the city.

Such selection of buildings and historical persons and events had to serve to the creation of the Soviet Russian identity of the city. All the other items are just passed over in silence.

Pictures presented in albums also show Hrodna as a modern industrial Soviet city. There are a lot of photos of new streets and high-rise buildings. In large part life of people, not architecture or history is shown in albums: smiling faces of men and women, representatives of different professions in places of employment, children in school uniforms, sportsmen and people of science. Distinguishing Hrodna landscapes rare serve as a background. Buildings of churches can appear in an image, but they would be out of focus or there would be only small unrecognisable part of a building (gate before Kalozha church on a background of trees, stones of the Old Castle wall) and a caption wouldn't mention names of historical buildings.

The icon of Hrodna has also changed. In 1983 a new drama theatre was built on the place of the former Minorites' (Bernardinki's) cloister. An outstanding example of modern architecture, the theater building was used to create a new symbol of Hrodna.

Frequency of presentation of architectural objects in the photos:

Book's imprint date and author	Pictures in the first pages	Total amount of	Panoramic view	The Castles	Orthodox and	Catholic ch.	Synagogues	Protestant ch.	Old architecture	Modern	Factories	Monuments
1975 (Kaluta)	Panorama (Neman river, Jesuits church, watch-tower, New Castle), Lenin's monument	39	6	0	1	0			10	13	11	6
1981 (Grablevsky)	Neman river, Woman with a child, A crossroad	52 ⁹			4	2			9	17	11	1

⁹ Concerning Hrodna

1987 (Kovkel)	vul. Savetskaya, vul. D. Haradzenskaha	30			2	2			4	7	1	0
1988 (Lichtarovich)	Panorama (Basilian's cloister, Drama theater, a street), Drama theatre and Bernardins' cloister, Panorama, Lenin's monument	159	7	6	7	14			29	31	2	10
2002 (Anishenko)	Panorama (Castles)	112	9	9	10	10	1	1	51	15		1
2003 (Lasminski)	Kalozha church Panorama	262	19	15	23	47	3	2	131	36		13

So, the guidebooks present absolutely new understanding of character, history, appearance of the city, which has nothing in common with the previous epoch.

3. **Time of Independence**

Late 1980-s and 1990-s became a new period for the history of the city. As a part of the new Independent Belarusian state Hrodna had to reinterpret itself. Belarusian identity is built upon history of medieval knighthoods, Great Duchy of Lithuania, Res Publica Polonia, and Independent Belarus. Hrodna once again became a city of royal residence and place of parliaments of Poland, of residence of Belarusian government in 1920.

New scientific researches upon history of the city were made using data given by Polish historian of the beginning of the century. There were made new excavations in the Old Castle, Kalozha church. A restoration committee prepared plans for reconstruction of the city square and rebuilding of the Parochial Vitoldian church. The New Castle was given to the Ministry of Culture and the Historical and Archeological museum removed there. Church buildings were returned to believers and they became opened for visitors. So, all these “lacking” places appeared again in the city space.

The topography of the city hasn't been change much due to political changes.

The new government also used erections of monuments as a method of building identity. Memorials to leaders and activists of Independent Belarus (of 1920-s) appeared throughout the city. Place of Hebrew ghetto was marked in the city space. Sites of destroyed churches were drawn on the street surface. Some of the old monuments were destroyed, but mostly new Belarusian and old Soviet monuments stay concurrently in the city space.

But the main changes occurred in the mental mapping of the city. New albums and guidebooks presented Hrodna as an “antique”, “old” city¹⁰. All the architectural monuments, sacred and profane, appeared once again in the city text. Lithuanian (understood as GDL) and Belarusian character of the city was emphasized. It became again a city of narrow streets and great history. Icons of Hrodna became the Old Castle as a residence of Great duke Vitaut together with Kalozha Church. Saint Kazimierz, patron of GDL, became one of the symbols of the city (Kaziuki fair was reestablished as a city fest). Hrodna is positioned as “a spiritual and cultural capital (of) the Grand Lithuanian Duchy, and later (of) Rzeczpospolita”¹¹.

Pictures in albums present first of all churches and castles, old streets of Hrodna. Old pictures of the city are reedited (for example, they are a part of *Гродна, Гродно, Grodno*, МН, 2003 album together with modern photos). Data cited in the table above demonstrate changes in imaginary of the city. This new representative mode remains actual for the modern situation.

4. **Nowadays**

During the last years no changes in virtual mapping of Hrodna were made. The convention of writing guidebooks and making photos of the city remains the same. But great changes in topography and architecture of the city are being hold. It seems like the time come to realize the ideas declared in guidebooks of 1970-s. The “old”, “antique”, “with narrow streets” Hrodna looks more and more like a “young industrial city”, “modern industrialized and cultural center”.

First of all, number and dimensions of streets and squares are being changed. Narrow-street Hrodna is being transformed into a city with broad streets and huge squares. New squares started to appear in the outskirts, and slowly approached to the historical core. A traditional place for a circus tent or provisional merry-go-rounds on Sovietskich pogranichnikov str. was changed into a square before a new-erected monument to Soviet frontier guards¹². A monument to Soviet militia was posed before a security services building, and after cutting trees in a nearby park a place before the monument formed a square. Former botanic garden (established in the end of 18th century by E.

¹⁰ *Гродна. Гродно* / Фота Г.Л. Ліхтаровіча, аўтар тэксту П.П. Макараў, Мн: Беларусь, 1988. 144 с.: 159 іл. *Гродно – XXI век: фотоальбом*/ фото М. Анищенко, предисловие Е. Жабрун, комментарии И. Трусов, Брест, 2002, 217 с.: 112 ил. *Гродна, Гродно, Grodno* / склад. А. Ласмінскі, аўтар тэксту Св. Куль-Сяльвестрава, Мн: Беларусь, 2003, 200 с.: іл.

¹¹ *Гродна, Гродно, Grodno*, МН, 2003, с. 17.

¹² About the importance of empty “usable” space in a city see: *The Berlin City Forum. Jacques Derrida, Kurt Foster and Wim Wenders*, “Architectural Design” 1992, p. 53.

Gilibert) was “ennobled”, a lot of old trees have been cut, as a result a monument to the Unknown Warrior, which stood in this park on the place of destroyed palace of Tyzenhauz, became a prominent dominant. The whole part of park before the monument from side of a street was denuded of trees. Optically it was united with an architectural ensemble from the other side of the street (it used to constitute common space with palace of Tyzenhauz in the 18th century when it was built), so that the square before the monument can almost come up with the Lenin square nearby. The last point of such squares changes was the reconstruction of the Savetskaya ploshcha made last year. The former city market and public garden on the place of destroyed Radziwills palace was transformed into an arterial road with an elongated huge square. Now Savetskaya ploshcha stretches from the North side of the market square to the Tank-monument on the Paris commune street. Its dimensions have been increased nearly four times. Buildings of churches became once again smaller optically, and the Tank became the new dominant of this square.

Another way of extension of city’s dimensions is broadening of its streets. During the last few years Gorky str., Vilenskaya str., D. Haradzenskaha str. were reorganized and widen. Trees on sides of streets are cut; pavements are diminished; obstructed buildings are destroyed; so that streets became half as much again wider, and nearby buildings smaller.

Empty space and expanses became the most characteristic features of Hrodna.

A price for this modernization was a destruction of valuable historical buildings (built in 19th – beginning of 20th century), such as 5, 12, 15, 21 Urytskaha str., 44 Savyalistychnaya str., 2 Gorky str. They were a part of historical district of Hrodna protected by law of Belarus. House of 29 Gorky str., an outstanding example of Hrodna constructivism buildings of 1930-s, was destroyed together with other buildings of the beginning of 20th century that formed earlier “Zalataya horka” (“Golden hill”) district for the sake of broadening of Gorky street.

Priority is given to the signs of postwar history of Hrodna, its military merits. New monuments erected or appeared due to topographical changes are mostly connected with war discourse. It is interesting that a monument now can be an architectural dominant outshining old city’s dominants (as the Tank or the Unknown Warrior monument).

No research or excavation works are made during the reconstruction of the city.

So appearance of Hrodna is changing headily and an old Soviet dream of industrial Hrodna is being consequently realized.

Not long ago a person approaching the city would see cupolas of orthodox and catholic churches dominating over the city panorama, but nowadays works of today’s generations are brought to the forefront. A TV-tower, high-rise residential and administrative buildings, factories and plants create appearance of Hrodna ...¹³

¹³ Гродненская область, Белорусская ССР, Мн., 1976, с. 102.