

Decrepit Historic Buildings Cast Shadow Over Moscow Day Festivities

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September 07, 2014



Detsky Mir (left) and the Sretensky Monastery (right) were among the dozens of buildings included in Arakhnadzor's blacklist.

Dozens of historic buildings have been demolished in Moscow since Mayor Sergei Sobyanin entered office in 2010, according to a list compiled by architectural watchdog Arkhnadzor, published on the eve of the city's anniversary celebrations.

More than 6 million people are believed to have participated in Moscow Day events over the course of a weekend replete with fireworks shows, concerts and other festivities, Sobyanin said in a speech. Moscow's main thoroughfare Tverskoi Bulvar, was closed to traffic, allowing thousands of Muscovites to wander unimpeded from one event to the next.

But the celebrations were also marked by a stark reminder of some of the losses Moscow's architectural heritage has incurred in recent years.

Arkhnadzor, Moscow's leading preservation movement, published a list of 60 historic buildings that have been demolished in the past four years. Most of them were destroyed in order to make way for new residential and commercial construction. Some were destroyed illegally.

When Sobyenin replaced Yury Luzhkov as Moscow's mayor, he vowed to protect the city's wealth of historical architecture. Prior to his entry into office, more than 100 buildings were destroyed each year on average, he said at the time.

Even though the average number of historic buildings demolished in the city center has decreased, the problem endures, according to Arkhnadzor.

For instance, the interior of the iconic "Detsky Mir" department store at Lubyanskaya Ploshchad was destroyed between 2011 and 2012. The roof was torn off in the process, leaving only the external walls to make room for a much larger commercial space.

Four 19th century buildings within the confines of the Sretensky Monastery on Ulitsa Bolshaya Lubyanka were also demolished in 2013, this time to be replaced with a much larger cathedral built to commemorate martyrs that suffered for the Russian Orthodox Church during the Soviet era.

The most recent loss is the Proshin House on Ulitsa Tverskaya-Yamskaya, whose facade was demolished in late August. The building was completed in 1905 and was recognized by experts as an important example of art deco architecture. It was destroyed illegally by developers who wanted to turn it into a hotel.

City Hall has withdrawn the company's construction permit and fined it 1 million rubles (\$27,000) for the violation.

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Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/09/07/decrepit-historic-buildings-cast-shadow-over-moscow-day-festivities-a39124>