

**“ROSTOV ARENA” STADIUM: REVIVAL
OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL THROUGH THE AUDIOVISUAL
AND INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION ON THE PERCEPTION
OF URBAN SPACE**

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Abstract. The article dwells on the analysis of audiovisual environment as a “living” sociocultural space in the framework of modern urbanism. The author considers audiovisual environment of a large sports stadium in Rostov-on-Don – “Rostov Arena”, and describes the practices of reading and interpreting its audiovisual content. “Rostov Arena” visitors demonstrate the ways of perception, communication and interpretation which are typical of a modern city dweller, who lives in a sociocultural space of a modern city overfilled with audiovisual objects and environments. His/her perceptions and interpretations are superficial, stereotypical, unoriginal, and often lack reflection. A contemporary city dweller tends to focus his/her attention on the “foreground” objects and events discarding all the rest as insignificant “background noise”. A modern man living in a big city adopts a multilevel network-like arrangement of both physical and social time and space: physical movement in one social time and space is parallel to and synchronic with the location in other temporal and spatial dimensions. The analysis of how a city dweller decodes and interprets audiovisual environment of a big city or a large urban object suggests a metaphorical analogy with “a man on the metro”: the outside world doesn't exist, it can be neither heard nor seen, “the second reality” seems to replace “the first”. Walking or driving along real streets and squares, we neither see nor hear the reality itself.

Keywords: “Rostov Arena” stadium, audiovisual environment, sociocultural space

Introduction

Audiovisual environment is a form of sociocultural space. It represents social reality which is constructed through everyday communication. In spite of the fact that ontological status and communicative nature of social reality is generally recognized by sociologists, the hypothesis mentioned above remains debatable. *This paper analyzes audiovisual environment as a “living” sociocultural space in the framework of modern urbanism.*

Objectives of the Study

In this study the author considers audiovisual environment of a large sports stadium in Rostov-on-Don (Russia) – “Rostov Arena”, and describes the practices of reading and interpreting its audiovisual content.

The study aims at answering the question of how audiovisual environment channels physical and sociocultural movement of an individual or a group of people by means of its spatial and symbolic properties. The study also addresses the questions of how everyday communication reveals and constructs sociocultural meanings of audiovisual dimension, and how social stereotypes, mental maps, thematic frames, and socio-stratification characteristics overlap with what we hear and what we see.

Methodology

This paper analyzes audiovisual environment as a “living” sociocultural space in the spirit of modern urbanism. Audiovisual environment is viewed as an open-ended space of “local-global nexus”, where the conscious and the unconscious coexist and penetrate each other, “the potential and diversity” become “embedded” and the main sociologists’ concern is to describe the emergence of the social in everyday practices (Amin, A., Thrift, N. 2002: 20). Audiovisual environment of a modern city is seen as a “living” sociocultural space which is being constructed through communication processes. In our research we rely on the concepts of social constructivism (Berger, P., Luckmann, T., 1967; Berger, P., Luckmann, T., 1995), the theory of “social production of space” (Lefebvre, H., 2002), the methodology in the framework of sociology of space (Law, J., 2006; Filippov, A.F., 2008), visual sociology (Sztompka, P., 2007; Sturken, M., Cartwright, L., 2009; Rose, G., 2016), audiovisual research (Yang, W. & Kang, J., 2005; You, J., Lee, P.J. & Jeon, J.Y., 2010; Ismail, M.R., 2013; Hong, J.Y. & Jeon, J.Y., 2013), semiotics of the “audiovisual text” (Barthes, R., 1997). Our study is based on a broad understanding of communication as interpreted by N. Luhmann (Luhmann, N., 2005: 9-10), modern theories of mediatization (Nim, E.G., 2017), the theories of “a media city” (McLuhan, M., 2003), “relational space”, the concept of a city as a “media-architecture complex” (McQuire, S., 2014). We analyze the revival of the audiovisual recognizing that social and cultural spaces are inseparable (Saraf, M.Ya., 2011), relying on the context of discourse and thematic frames (Goffman, E.; 2004; Yadov, V.A., 2011; Vakhshayn, V.S., 2011), actor-network and institutions-network theories (Latour, B., 2014; Castells, M., 2000; Maltseva, D.V., Romanovsky, N.V., 2011). This enables us to study the dynamics and multi-way fulfillment of the potential of audiovisual environment, to look at how its meanings are created, decoded, conveyed and transformed.

Audiovisual Environment of “Rostov Arena” Stadium

City dwellers tend to view large stadiums as important landmarks and attractive visual objects of a modern city, ranking them on a par with embankments, parks, museums, main streets and districts. “Rostov Arena” is a sports stadium, which was built in 2012-2018 in Rostov-on-Don (Russia) ahead of 2018 Football World Cup. The stadium was positioned as a modern hi-tech structure for sports and cultural events, which is in line with current trends in engineering and meets the most demanding needs of the public – an attractive, cost-effective world-class sports venue and a newsmaker. However, after the Championship was over, its status began to decline and the stadium has now turned into a place for regional-scale sports and cultural events.

The main meaningful and functional characteristics of the stadium are defined by its location, layout and architectural design. This large world-class sports object is a monumental, ambitious, state-of-the-art structure, very expensive and elite; the area is closed and protected, with preplanned movement patterns. The stadium is situated on the Left bank of the Don river on the edge of Rostov-on-Don. Located in the open area, which in fact is a reclaimed land, the stadium happens to be situated in close proximity to highway arteries. The stadium gives you a sense of grandeur, which is further intensified by the way the boundaries of the structure and communication routes are designed: two roads lead to the stadium, traffic is heavily regulated by road signs and markings. There are one-way approach and exit roads. Everything is carefully planned: parking spaces and pedestrian zones, crossings and pavements, separate entry points for regular-visitors, VIP-visitors and personnel, for private and freight transport - all equipped with modern technological means of control, security and surveillance systems (driveway gates, crossing points, fences, CCTV cameras).

Visual environment of the stadium is styled as a world-class sports venue and it seems that it targets foreign visitors rather than our fellow countrymen. The names of the premises, areas and zones, crossings and sectors mostly have numeric and pictographic design, brief inscriptions are made in English and Russian, in some cases English-language terminology is used (for instance, “skybox entrance”). The color scheme is predominantly grey, indoor premises are decorated in pastel shades (grey and beige), which reinforces the impression of a large unified area. There are two bright “spots” that stand out against the background – a media façade and a bright green football field, which is lit by large square lamps and surrounded by rows of red and blue leather seats. The upper circle is

made up of media screens and billboards, and the open blue sky is hanging above.

When approaching the stadium, visitors find themselves in the open area of the adjacent territory (Levoberezhniy park). In the evenings and at nights an impressive media façade can be seen. Following the security screening process, visitors take a long walk along the asphalt ground and the concrete stylobate. Then, following laconic signs, they go up and down stairs and crossings or take a heavy narrow elevator. Through the glass walls of the interior corridors visitors can see the football field in all its glory. Background sound at the stadium is technologically advanced and produces a cosmopolitan effect: sound penetrates into all corners of the stadium, both indoor and outdoor areas, the playlist includes modern instrumental music, mostly foreign songs. But it is the football field that the loudest sound is centered in and where audiovisual effect is the strongest. Audio environment of the stadium is closely connected with thematic frames: when the stadium is empty, every step is echoing within its walls; when football fans flock to the stadium, it gets filled with stadium anthems and sports chants; when the stadium hosts a concert, the noise of the crowd, cheers and applause remind you of a popular musical show.

Research Methods and Materials

In October 2018 the audiovisual environment of “Rostov Arena” Stadium was studied in the framework of a project called «Developing audiovisual environment of a modern Russian city in the context of preservation and transfer of ethical values of the Russian culture» (the RFBR project № 18-011-00841; the research programme has passed expert review in All-Russia Public Opinion Research Center, southern division (VCIOM-Yug)). The research relies on the following methods: observation method, photographic method, informal interview method. The study looks at how audiovisual environment of “Rostov Arena” Stadium becomes a “living” sociocultural space.

The research material was collected during a relatively neutral event, namely the IX Science Festival in the South of Russia. The respondents were chosen among high school students from Rostov-on-Don and the Rostov Region, their parents, teachers, university and college students and teachers who took part in the event. The respondents shared their impressions, interpretations and evaluation of the audiovisual environment of the venue. The respondents (40 people), stratified according to age and sex, were randomly chosen and interviewed during the event. In a week interviews were held with the students of Southern Federal University who visited the stadium at different times (20 people, purposive sampling).

Findings

What do “Rostov Arena” Visitors Hear and See? The vast majority of visitors at the Science Festival came to “Rostov Arena” to see the stadium where the Football World-Cup had taken place three months before. The IX Science Fest was held in an inside area - the interior corridor of the stadium, while the field was a leisure area. The corridors were filled with exhibition units devoted to the theme of the Science Fest. For two days, from 20 to 21 October, crowds of people were “flowing” along the narrow corridors and “streaming” to the field. Although the visitors' attention was focused on the exhibition, the football field remained the main center of attraction and some sort of final destination. Thus, a football field in the stadium appears to be the core of any thematic frame.

Signs and inscriptions escape the attention of the crowd; visitors didn't take any notice of what was written on signs and billboards, what language was used (the names of sectors and zones were in both Russian and English, sometimes only in English). However, respondents report their impressions of the majestic silhouette when approaching the stadium from the park and the bus stops. The stadium is particularly impressive in the evening and at night when it is brightly lit. Inside the stadium the brightly lit green football field and vivid leather seats capture visitors' attention. Leather seats are a symbol of the stadium, which reflects its function, status, specificity, and reminds of the recent World-Cup.

When no large scale public events are held, visitors, who come to the stadium either in groups or alone, see and hear a completely different picture: the empty echoing stadium, where visitors can take time to examine the architecture and design, colors and details, signs and inscriptions. In the crowded stadium, on the contrary, the same signs and inscriptions on the office doors and sanitary facilities are only noticed when a visitor is deliberately looking for a particular area, zone or room. In a crowded place a person's attention to what he sees or hears becomes scattered, his perception gets less critical, and narrows down to simple operational tasks: to avoid a bustling place, to keep one's own child in sight, to avoid bumping into someone, to take a closer look at the interior. This is when the attention is captured by bright, vivid, extraordinary, large or dangerous objects and foreground sounds, while all other audiovisual effects are treated as background noise which is not worthy of attention. In a cluttered environment of a crowded place a person's perceptual abilities are reduced giving way to stereotypes and patterns, which fill the gaps in “the invisible”, mental maps and images. According to U. Neisser, when one is performing locomotions (i.e. moving in space), he inevitably gathers information, focuses his attention on the objects and events “on the foreground”, while

perceiving the objects “on the background” or many objects simultaneously appears to be difficult, if not impossible (Neisser, U., 1981: 51-58). However, the psychological process of creating images is prior to the act of perception (and is based on the mental and the social).

Audiovisual environment of a big crowded place appears to be a blurred mosaic mix of emotions, impressions, previous audiovisual experience, stereotypes and patterns. A generalized image of the stadium is a mental-social construct rather than a spatial-functional object, whereas the knowledge of the subject-matter is inbuilt into a web of social and cultural values, beliefs, stereotypes and patterns. A visitor sees and hears the stadium through the lens of his socio-cultural orientations relying on a full range of information at his disposal. A visitor’s perception is defined by a stereotyped image of the stadium as a modern, expensive, world-class, unique object, which was specially designed to host the Football World Cup, to welcome guests and the strongest football teams from all over the world. The stadium has a great attractive force; visitors spend most of their time in their seats looking at the football field. This is what they came for – the football field – the venue for the festive event of social value (it does not exist in real time and space but a guest can reconstruct it), they came to make photos on its background (I have been here, I am a part of it). A modern man living in a big city adopts a multilevel network-like arrangement of both physical and social time and space: physical movement in one social time and space (in everyday reality) is parallel to and synchronic with the location in other temporal and spatial dimensions. A person is moving through time and space of a city or a large object, preoccupied with his/her own affairs, but he/she sees and hears different time and space. Some time ago people used to read in public transport, but today people in the streets are talking on the phone, and that is their “first”, “foreground” reality. By doing so, one can switch off from reality for a while, avoid contacts with strangers and beggars. A man can become a part of audiovisual environment by photographing, making “selphies”, creating a desired image of himself/herself, manipulating both objective and subjective characteristics of space, and then post it in social networks with one click.

Public audiovisual environments and objects, which are perceived by city dwellers in daily-life practices, appear to be “living” socio-cultural spaces, that are “read” and “decoded” in the context of mental maps, thematic frames, social backgrounds, stereotypes and conservative attitudes, which are intensified in line with the size of the crowd and the motion speed. Of particular interest is the connection between “the stadium” and the so-called “punktum” (Barthes R., 1997). Football fans came to “Rostov Arena” to see the football field; tour guides adopted a more pragmatic, professional

approach looking for “the right” places to buy tickets for upcoming matches and concerts; high school students and their parents showed interest in the exhibition and any information concerning admission to universities; children and teenagers enjoyed the entertainment program of the Science Festival. But at the same time, “Rostov Arena” stadium as the venue for the 2018 Football World Cup remained the leading thematic frame and the attractor for all visitors irrespective of their “punktum”.

Discussion

The example of “Rostov Arena” visitors illustrates the ways of perception, communication and interpretation of audiovisual information typical of a modern city dweller. It is a social behavior pattern of a modern man, who lives in a sociocultural space of a modern city overfilled with audiovisual objects and environments. His/her perceptions and interpretations are superficial, stereotypical, unoriginal and often lack reflection. A contemporary city dweller tends to focus his/her attention on the “first-line”, “foreground” objects and events discarding all the rest as insignificant “background noise”. A modern man living in a big city adopts a multilevel network-like arrangement of both physical and social time and space in the spirit of actor-network theory (Latour, B., 2014) or institutional-network approach (Castells, M., 2000). Physical movement in one social time and space (in everyday reality) is parallel to and synchronic with the location in other temporal and spatial dimensions. The analysis of how a city dweller decodes and interprets audiovisual environment of a big city or a large urban object suggests a metaphorical analogy with “a man on the metro”: the outside world doesn't exist, it can be neither heard nor seen, “the second reality” seems to replace “the first”. Walking or driving along real streets and squares we neither see nor hear the reality itself.

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