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An Incomplete Merger. Rostov-on-Don and Nakhichevan as Peculiar Urbanization Projects in the Russian Empire's South

The paper analyses Rostov and Nakhichevan on Don as a peculiar case of Russian Imperial urban development between the late eighteenth and early twentieth century. Gradually merging into one urban metropolis, both cities remained separate political entities with their own systems of self-governance and bureaucracies due to economic conjunctures and distinct patterns of migration. By focusing on gravitational and centrifugal factors between the Russian and Armenian communities, the article provides a dynamic perspective on how local elites and communities negotiated the promises of economic prosperity and the emerging challenges of nationalism within a shared multiethnic urban space. The example opens the view for a variety of development paths of cities beyond the "Western European standard case", as urban growth and economic entanglement between the two adjacent cities was not followed by political and administrative unification.

1. Introduction

In the final decades of the Russian Empire's existence, the adjacent cities Rostov and Nakhichevan-on-Don constituted one single urban metropolis with almost a quarter of a million residents. They were located at the crossroads of trade and transport routes between the Russian heartland, the Caucasus, the Southwestern governorates, Siberia, and the Black Sea World.¹ On the eve of the First World War, the inhabitants had every reason to expect a prosperous future due to increasing exports and the metropolis's industrial potential.² Ho-

¹ F. I. Potashev, *Grad Rostova, Rostov-na-Donu* 2007; Ilya Kuznetsov, *Proshloe Rostova. Ocherki po istorii goroda Rostova-na-Donu*, 2. ed., Rostov-na-Donu 2012; Sarkis Kazarov/Levon Batiev/Sergei Sayadov (eds.), *Nakhichevan'-na-Donu. Istoriya i sovremennost'*, Rostov-na Donu 2019.

² Natalya Samarina, *Rostov-on-Don in the Second Half of the 19th - early 20th Century. Dynamics and Specificities of the Socio-economic Development*, in: Gelina Harlaftis et al. (eds.), *Between Grain and Oil from the Azov to the Caucasus. The Port-cities of the Eastern Coast of the Black Sea, late 18th - early 20th Century*, Rethymnon 2020, p. 369-397; Sarkis Kazarov, *Nahichevan-on-Don. Armenian Merchants and their Role in the Commercial Development of the Azov*, in: Harlaftis, *Between Grain and Oil*, p. 399-427; Vladimir Barxowdaryan, *Nor Naxievani haykakan gaowt-i patmowt-yown*, Erevan 1967.

wever, there was a key difference between the Russian Rostov and the Armenian Nakhichevan that distinguished these entities from other Russian economic centres such as St. Petersburg, Riga, Odessa, and Baku, a difference that was concealed in many of the city maps of the period: Rostov and Nakhichevan-on-Don remained two separate political entities with distinct systems of self-governance and bureaucracies administering a shared multiethnic urban space. Located on the lower reach of the river Don, on its estuary into the Sea of Azov, and surrounded by Don Cossack territory with its own legal and social system, the two cities constituted a dual administrative enclave within the Don region.³

The merging of cities is a key element of urban development in the modern era. Demographic growth, increasing economic entanglement, and the structural expansion of urban space often erased the distinction between two or more formally separated cities and could lead to the merging of both cities into one single metropolis. A new political status given to a city could further stimulate the administrative integration of cities, as the merger of Berlin with Kölln and four other towns into the Prussian capital of Berlin in 1710 exemplifies. Mergers of cities took place in multi-ethnic empires as well – the establishment of Austria-Hungary’s dual monarchy with Buda as the traditional capital of Hungary paved the way for the merger with Pest into one political administration in 1873. In the late Russian Empire, some of the most dynamic economic centres were located at its multi-ethnic peripheries, such as Riga, Odessa, and Baku.⁴ Ethnic diversity left its marks *within* different quarters of cities, dominated by Latvians, Germans, Greeks, or Jews. Though the Empire reigned over a variety of complex ethno-confessional urban landscapes with a variety of local self-administrations, the example of Rostov and Nakhichevan is unique as their dual ethno-political structure remained intact even when, at the end of the nineteenth century, their size, urban infrastructure, and entangled economy would have arguably justified the administrative merger into one city.

The roots of this specific setting date back to the late eighteenth century, when Catherine II integrated the northern Black Sea littoral into the Russian Empire.⁵ Nakhichevan and Rostov were products of absolutist policies of settlement and economic development in the age of enlightenment, which led to the

³ Shane O'Rourke, *Warriors and Peasants. The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia*, Basingstoke 2000.

⁴ Guido Hausmann, *Universität und städtische Gesellschaft in Odessa 1865-1917. Soziale und nationale Selbstorganisation an der Peripherie des Zarenreichs*, Stuttgart 1998; Ulrike von Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit. Deutsche, Letten, Russen und Juden in Riga 1860-1914*, Göttingen 2006.

⁵ Marc Raeff, *In the Imperial Manner*, in: Marc Raeff (ed.), *Catherine the Great. A Profile*, New York 1972, p. 197-246; Hans Auerbach, *Die Besiedlung der Südukraine in den Jahren 1774-1787*, Wiesbaden 1965.

establishment of different legal and administrative systems.⁶ Between their foundation in the late eighteenth century and the eve of the Great Reforms in the 1860s, state politics towards non-Russian groups, the development of cities, and the diversity within the legal system changed fundamentally.

In all multi-ethnic cities of the late Tsarist Empire, cultural, social, and economic modernization took place in contradictory ways, which affected the co-existence of different ethnic groups. Over the course of the nineteenth century, tensions could arise between the socialization (*Vergesellschaftung*) of urban societies, fostered by economic cooperation, education, and (limited) political participation, and the communalization (*Vergemeinschaftung*) of different ethnic groups within the city, fuelled by emerging national identities. Where ethnic and social inequalities coincided, as was the case in Baku or Riga, the fear of social disintegration was palpable. After 1991, particularly those cities in the peripheral regions of European Russia, that became sites of escalating national conflict, drew the attention of historians. They emphasised economic, political, and demographic factors to explain them.⁷ Other studies focusing on urban development in these regions through the lens of modernization theories are often limited to the period between the Great Reforms and the First World War.⁸ The present study aims at a more balanced approach by expanding the period under investigation to the pre-reform era and considering culture as an equally important field for negotiating urban identities. In order to avoid any inevitability of ethnic conflict, this study of Rostov and Nakhichevan investigates gravitational and centrifugal factors contributing to socialization and communalization as the underlying dynamic of this specific urbanization process that would end in an “incomplete merger” of the cities.

This article discusses the reason both communities' economic successes and (relative) failures against the legacy of Russia's enlightened city planning. As consistent urban development was hampered by conflicting political goals of

⁶ Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field. Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe*, Ithaca 2016.

⁷ Christoph Mick, *Nationalismus und Modernisierung in Lemberg 1867-1914*, in: Carsten Goehrke/Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (eds.), *Städte im östlichen Europa. Zur Problematik von Modernisierung und Raum vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Zürich 2006, p. 171-213; Ronald Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918. Class Nationality in the Russian Revolution*, Princeton 2019; A. Henriksson, *Riga. Growth, Conflict and the Limitations of Good Government 1850-1914*, in: M. Hamm (ed.): *The City in Late Imperial Russia*, Bloomington 1986, p. 177-207.

⁸ Rainer Lindner, *Städtische Modernisierung im südlichen Zarenreich. Ekaterinoslav und Zitomir, 1860-194*, in: Carsten Goehrke/Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (eds.): *Städte im östlichen Europa. Zur Problematik von Modernisierung und Raum vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Zürich 2006, p. 281-316.

the centre and the peripheral location of both cities, analysing local actors and constellations becomes all the more important. By exploring the centrifugal and gravitational forces affecting the two communities, this paper seeks a more dynamic perspective on urban development within multi-ethnic regions of the Empire. The first section of this article discusses the conditions for Nakhichevan's early economic success and the factors that subsequently led to a reversal in the economic and demographic relation between Nakhichevan and Rostov. The second section addresses local and regional gravitational forces that contributed to the merging of the two. The third section discusses centrifugal forces that helped maintain a distance between the two cities and their residents as political and imagined communities.

2. Dominance and competition. Nakhichevan and Rostov in the pre-reform era

As the Empire's only – indirect – access to the Black Sea, the lower Don region gained military and economic importance in the eighteenth century. In 1749, the crown founded a custom post on the estuary of the Temernik into the Don to control and harvest the increased trade volume between Greeks, Tatars, Cossacks, and Ukrainian merchants in the region. To subject the Don Cossacks and secure the border against the Crimean Khanate, Empress Elisabeth ordered the construction of the fortress Saint Dmitrii Rostovskii in 1761. A multi-ethnic settlement of soldier families, merchants, artisans, and Cossacks was located west of the fortress, gradually developing into the city of Rostov.

In 1779, when the northern Black Sea coast had become part of the Empire, the crown founded the Armenian colony of Nakhichevan east of the fortress with three thousand Armenian settlers that had left the Crimean Khanate following promises of land and privileges. The imperial state wanted to deprive the weakened Ottoman vassal of its commercially most active population. Very much like the invitation of German settlers, Catherine II aimed at utilizing migrants' commercial and agricultural skills to develop the fertile but sparsely populated northern Black Sea provinces. Armenian colonists on the Don received material provisioning for erecting their town and were exempted from taxes and levies for 15 years. Inhabitants of the five surrounding Armenian villages worked their lands not as serfs but as free peasants. Catherine's charter of privileges guaranteed this ethnic (not estate-based) community extensive rights of self-government, exercised through a self-elected magistracy and their own court. The charter also provided the settlers with a distinct legal code that contained detailed regulations on criminal, civil, and family law, as well

as on Armenian trade practices, giving merchants and craftsmen a clear advantage within the weakly developed legal system of the Empire.⁹

At the core of Nakhichevan's self-government was a magistracy consisting of six members. It regulated the main issues of law, the police, the economy, and community welfare. Together with 24 elected persons, these six members formed the city дума, which elected the head of the city for a five-year term. As in most peripheral cities of the Empire, there was a clear discrepancy between the institutional framework of urban politics and local political practice.¹⁰ The poorly defined powers of дума and magistracy meant that the city head was in fact in a position of great formal and informal power over financial matters, while the local Armenian elites hardly distinguished between commercial and political activities, giving the system an oligarchic character.¹¹ At the same time, when this powerful position was filled with energetic people such as the entrepreneur Arutyun Khalibyan (1790-1871), who managed to triple the city's budget in his two tenures and entertained good, often informal relations with the regional imperial authorities, this form of self-government opened up great scope for further urban development.¹²

From the perspective of the imperial centre in St. Petersburg, Nakhichevan was one of the most successful settlement projects of the period of "enlightened colonialism"¹³ in southern Russia. Through Armenian trade and crafts, the city quickly developed into the economic pacesetter of the Don region, southern Russia, and the foothills of the Caucasus. The social composition of the colonists, many of them originating from the urban Crimean cultural milieu, gave Nakhichevan's trade and handicrafts an in-built advantage.¹⁴ Demographic developments reflected economic dominance: In 1810, the city's population outranked that of Taganrog, the largest port on the Sea of Azov, by 22 % and that of Novocherkassk, the newly founded capital of the Don Cossack host, by 45 %.¹⁵

⁹ Levon Batiev, *Novo-Nakhichevan Magistrate. Origin, Structure, Functions*, in: *Bylye Gody* 48:2, 2018, p. 518-527.

¹⁰ Boris Mironov, *Bureaucratic- or Self-Government. The Early Nineteenth Century Russian City*, in: *Slavic Review* 52:2, 1993, p. 233-255.

¹¹ Anatole de Demidoff, *Travels in Southern Russia, and the Crimea; through Hungary, Wallachia, & Modavia, during the Year 1837*, London 1853, p. 361.

¹² Minas Bagdykov/Georgii Bagdykov/Tigran Bagdykov, *Arutiun Khalibian, Rostov-na-Donu* 2011.

¹³ Cf. *Sunderland*, p. 53 f.

¹⁴ Cf. *Kazarov, Nakhichevan-on-Don*, p. 402.

¹⁵ Cf. Sergei Sushchii, *Nakhichevan' i Rostov-na-Donu. Sotsiodemograficheskie aspekty razvitiya (seredina-vtoraya polovina XIX veka)*, in: *Edik Minasian/Karine Chalabyan (eds.), Armianskaya obshchina Dona v noveishchii period. Istoriya, instituty,*

Armenian traders operated within an “immense triangle ... between Astrakhan, Leipzig and Asia Minor”¹⁶ and laid the foundation for growing prosperity and political goodwill in the region’s capital, Odessa and St. Petersburg. Their trade encompassed a wide range of products, from luxury goods such as caviar, silk, and jewellery to wool, tallow, and leather, as well as horses, cattle, and sheep. The expansion of trade into the Caucasus and the emerging cities of its northern foothills, such as Stavropol’, where numerous Nakhichevan families moved, was of particular strategic relevance for the Empire.¹⁷ Armenian merchants entered into intensive trade relations with various Caucasian “mountain tribes” well before the Empire was able to subjugate the region militarily.¹⁸

Key to the economic success of the city and the capitalist development of the entire region was the close interplay of trade and production.¹⁹ Unlike in most Russian cities, the free Armenian peasants of the surrounding area did not compete with the urban merchants but entered a symbiotic relationship by profitably selling their agricultural products for further processing. In 1822, one-third of the total population worked as artisans in 33 different manufactories, where tallow, leather and wool, candles, but also leather goods, weapons, clothing, and jewellery were extracted and manufactured.²⁰ This supply, combined with the demand for raw materials, directed long-term trade flows to the lower Don region, creating growing regional demand and helping establish market relations in the new Russian provinces.

Rostov long remained in the shadow of its economically successful neighbour. It did, however, benefit from advantageous regional conditions. Between the 1830s and 1860s, Rostov established itself as a competitor to the Armenian city, which it finally overtook in the second half of the century. It was one of the few cities in the Empire that did not grow out of “the needs of the state”, such as administrative or military considerations, but as an economic centre

identichnost’. Sbornik nauchnykh statei, Erevan 2020, p. 139-151, 140.

¹⁶ Demidoff, p. 361.

¹⁷ Vartan Oganessian, Rodstvennye sviasi krupnykh armyanskikh kuptsov Nakhichevani-na-Donu i Armavira XIX - nachala XX vv. i ikh rol’ v sotsial’no-ekonomicheskom razvitii regiona, in: Kazarov/Batiev/Sayadov (eds.), Nakhichevan’-na-Donu, p. 251-260; Kazarov, Nahichevan-on-Don.

¹⁸ Nataliya Volkova, O rasselenii Armyan na severnom kavkaze do nachala XX veka, in: Istoriko-filologicheskii zhurnal 3, 1966, p. 257-270.

¹⁹ Zhores Ananyan/Vladimir Barkhudaryan, Nekotorye voprosy ekonomicheskogo razvitiya armyanskikh kolonii Novorossii, in: Istoriko-filologicheskii zhurnal 2, 1979, p. 211-222.

²⁰ “Ob Armianakh, obshchestvami v Rossii vodvorivshikhsia, s pokazaniem chisla zhitelei”, in: S.M. Sayadov (ed.), Sobranie aktov otnosiashchikhsia k obozreniiu istorii armianskogo Naroda 1, 1833, p. 120-126, 124.

created as a result of the “circumstances of a territory”.²¹ It was not planned by the imperial centre, which focused on Taganrog and Novocherkassk as the paramount imperial cities in the region. And unlike Nakhichevan, Rostov did not pursue a monoethnic settlement concept.²²

A long tradition of illegal migration of Ukrainian and Russian peasants to the Don region, which dated back to the seventeenth century, rendered any form of migration control a significant challenge to the imperial authorities throughout the period under consideration. The municipal administration was forced to adopt pragmatic strategies, a tendency enhanced by the growing demand for labour.²³ The lack of ethnic or religious settlement restrictions gave Rostov a decisive advantage over Nakhichevan, allowing Greek and English trading houses to settle here, which integrated the city into the expanding networks of the Black Sea trade. The gradual rise of sea trade as opposed to the previously dominant land trade in the eastern Black Sea region was another factor for the shift from Nakhichevan to Rostov as economic hub. The Sea of Azov acquired increased importance for grain export during the first half of the nineteenth century, while the land trade routes followed by Armenian merchants to the south and east lost importance. Rostov was already flourishing as a transshipment point for an ever-increasing quantity of goods due to its location on the lower Don, the natural transport route for grain from the central Russian growing regions, and iron from the Urals. The relocation of the custom post from Taganrog back to Rostov in 1836 immensely simplified the increasing export and expanded the city’s trade volume from 342,000 roubles to 2.8 million roubles by 1846.²⁴ The city once again became a crossroads for domestic and foreign trade: two large annual two-week fairs in spring and autumn were established to meet the demands of Cossacks, nomads, peasants, and merchants. These quickly surpassed Nakhichevan’s earlier bazaar in importance.²⁵

The third factor in Rostov’s rise lay in the gradual abolition of Armenian privileges leading up to the introduction of the empire-wide city ordinance of 1872. Nakhichevan’s liberties had been disputed by Russian competitors on the ground and also within the Imperial Senate, as part of the so-called Armenian

²¹ A. S. Senyavskii, *Urbanizatsiya Rossii v XX veke. Rol’ v istoricheskom protsesse*, Moskva 2003, p. 55.

²² Cf. Sushchii, p. 142.

²³ *Zasedanie Gorodskoi Upravy Goroda Rostov-na-Donu, 18.5.1836*, in: *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rostovskoi oblasti (GARO)*, f. 90, op. 2, d. 13.

²⁴ Kuznetsov, p. 73.

²⁵ Cf. *Voennoe-statisticheskoe obozrenie Rossiiskoi Imperii 1837–1854*, Vol. 11, *Novorossiiskaya guberniya, Besarabskaya oblast’ i zemlia voiska Donskogo 1849–1850*, St. Petersburg 1849, p. 142.

question.²⁶ While advocates for preserving local privileges considered Armenian settlers, merchants, and clergymen as natural allies in the Empire's expansion into the Caucasus, factions in the Senate that considered the embattled region as a colony to be exploited tended to oppose Armenian privileges. Due to contradictions in state policy, continuous advocacy in the capital, and Nakhichevan's profitability for the state treasury, the city managed to retain its privileges longer than any other of the Empire's Armenian colonies.²⁷

Nakhichevan's system drew criticism because of a lack of transparency and its inefficiency, and due to the (allegedly) negative consequences for Russian merchants. The proponents of the Great Reforms, who, after the lost Crimean War, aimed at modernising the Empire without threatening the autocratic system, successfully pushed the idea that a comprehensive socioeconomic modernization could only be achieved through unified legal and administrative state structures. Only at this juncture did the political discourse shift to the disadvantage of the Armenian community, often gravitating towards Russian nationalist discourses.²⁸ The judicial reform of 1864 started a process in which the imperial centre gradually dismantled Nakhichevan's self-administration by passing police control to the neighbouring city of Rostov in 1868, and finally by replacing its ethnopolitical self-government with a *duma* in accordance with the new empire-wide city ordinance.²⁹ From an Armenian perspective, this process of political homogenization meant the end of cultural and political autonomy. Yet, as the prior existing Armenian police and judicial bodies had been overburdened by financial constraints and population growth, many Armenians actually favoured administrative unification and the increased resources that came with it. Nakhichevan's new political order eventually continued privileging a small elite of Armenian entrepreneurs. Census voting rights for the municipal *duma* were linked to real estate ownership, which remained largely in Armenian hands despite the growing Russian population in the city: In 1912, there were 6,500 Armenian and 28,500 Russian residents of Nakhichevan, but the Armenians still controlled the absolute majority of seats on the city *duma*.

²⁶ Stephen Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace. The Tsarist Empire and the Armenians, 1801-1914*, Ithaca 2020, p. 124-161.

²⁷ "Ob Armyanach, obshchestvami v Rossii vodvorivshichsya, s pokazaniem chisla zhitelej", in: *Sobranie aktov otnosyashchichsya k obozreniyu istorii armyanskago Naroda*, Moscow 1833, p. 120-126.

²⁸ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire. A Multiethnic History*, London/New York 2001, p. 247-282.

²⁹ Cf. Levon Batiev, *Politseiskaya sluzhba v Nakhichevani-na-Donu (konets XVIII-XIX vv.)*, in: *Voprosy Armenovedeniia* 3, 2018, p. 38-51, 42; Barchovdaryan, p. 362; Levon Batiev, *The Transformation of Nakhichevan-on-Don's Self-Government in the 1860s*, in: *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 19:1, 2020, p. 155-173.

3. Centripetal forces

Which economic, social, demographic, and political processes accelerated the unity of Rostov and Nakhichevan as an urban community, both real and imagined? Already in the first third of the nineteenth century, certain Rostov merchants made efforts to establish business relations with merchants from Nakhichevan. Access to wider trade and credit networks served as a stimulus for such contacts. Conflicts with the surrounding Don Cossacks over access to the region's resources further encouraged cooperation between Rostov and Nakhichevan, a tendency amplified in the second half of the nineteenth century by tensions between the multi-ethnic entrepreneurial spirit of the city dwellers and the Cossacks' anti-commercial identity.³⁰

As Rostov replaced Nakhichevan as the paramount economic centre from the 1860s on, the two cities gradually merged into one urban space. This required the creation and modernization of infrastructures and corresponding forms of cooperation between the multi-ethnic Rostov and the more homogeneous Nakhichevan. Despite reservations and distrust among elites, the two administrations worked together on costly infrastructure projects from which both communities benefited. Under the umbrella of the regional *zemstvo* (institution of local government), both sides participated in the construction of a new bridge over the Don in the 1860s.³¹ Russian and Armenian representatives became involved in the Delta Committee, founded in 1865, which, with the involvement of engineers and representatives of the Ministry of Transport, was to survey the Don Delta and accumulate funds to increase the draft of its main branch so that larger merchant ships could dock at the cities' ports.³²

Within the coalescing urban space, a more refined division of labour between the two cities emerged and linked different strata of their populations to areas of the other city. With the establishment of the Rostov Stock Exchange in 1867 and the modernization of port and warehouse facilities, most Armenian merchants moved their headquarters to Rostov, which became the centre of commerce and industry. Towards the end of the century, Nakhichevan was considered by the local business elites to be a quieter, less hectic place than booming Rostov, where people could retreat to their weekend homes or sociali-

³⁰ Cf. Kazarov, *Nahichevan-on-Don*, p. 416.

³¹ *Postanovleniya ocherednogo Rostovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniya Oktiabr'skoi sessii 1868 goda, Rostov-on-Don 1869*, p. 87.

³² *Materialy o morskikh portov Rossii, 1911*, Box 2024, Nauchno-spravocnaia biblioteka RGIA; P.E. Beliavskii, *Donskie Girla*, St. Petersburg 1888; *Rostovskii-na-Donu torgovyi port. Otchet po Rostovskomu-na-Donu torgovomu portu, Rostov-on-Don 1917*, p. 47.

se at the local yacht club.³³ The massive influx of Russian workers into Nakhichevan, people who were employed in the factories and the port facilities of Rostov but could not find affordable housing there, initially benefited Armenian house and land owners financially. The merchant Minas Balabanov (1844-1917(?)), who served intermittently as Nakhichevan's city head for 21 years, used infrastructure projects specifically to reduce nationalist tensions. He was one of the *Grenzgänger*³⁴ (border crossers) who established networks in ethnically dominated city districts in the Russian Empire of the second half of the century and tried to transcend and defuse ethnic differences. Balabanov knew the danger of nationalist resentment directed against his own businesses, which he ran as a factory owner and landlord in various multi-ethnic regions of the Empire.³⁵ In 1890, he initiated the first horse-drawn tramway line between the two cities in order to improve transport, but also with the deliberate aim of shortening Russian workers' daily commute to Rostov. Here, the modernization of the Armenian cityscape, the networking of both cities into one urban space, was combined with the attempt to neutralise a potential field of conflict and improve Russian workers' living conditions. In another instance, Balabanov aimed at diffusing accusations of discrimination and cultural marginalization of the Russian inhabitants of Nakhichevan, attacks that were repeatedly launched in the Rostov press. After overcoming resistance from Armenian elites, Balabanov successfully turned to the merchant Gavril Shushpatov in Rostov to finance the construction of the first Russian Orthodox Church in Nakhichevan.³⁶ This building project not only calmed the waves of popular anti-Armenian sentiment, but also signalled the loyalty of the Armenian community to the Autocracy.

³³ Cf. Anna Ivanova-Ilicheva/Irina Stushniaia/Olga Baeva, *Arkhitekturno-gradostroitelnoe razvitiie Nakhichevani-na-Donu v kontekste formirovaniya gorodskoi kultury*, in: *Istoricheskie, filosoficheskie i iuridicheskie nauki, kulturologiya i iskusstvovedenie. Voprosy teorii i praktiki* 10:3, 2014, p. 81-83.

³⁴ Cf. Jörg Gebhard, *Ein problematisches Modernisierungsexempel. Lublin 1815-1914*, in: Carsten Goehrke/Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (eds.), *Städte im östlichen Europa. Zur Problematik von Modernisierung und Raum vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Zürich 2006, p. 215-251, 236.

³⁵ Cf. Sarkis Kazarov, *Nakhichevanskoe kupechestvo (konets XVIII – nachalo XX veka)*, Rostov-na-Donu 2012, p. 49.

³⁶ Cf. Georgii Bagdykov/Oksana Mordovina, *Vsemu gorodu golova. Minas Balabanov*, Taganrog 2020, p. 68-75.

4. Centrifugal forces

In the numerous conflicts between Rostov and Nakhichevan over land distribution, the use of the Don River and access to markets during the pre-reform period, both sides repeatedly petitioned the imperial authorities in Taganrog, Ekaterinoslav, Odessa, and St. Petersburg. The introduction of the 1872 city ordinance sought to foster the urban elites' responsibility for their communities and their participation in the construction of technical, social, and cultural infrastructure.³⁷ In Nakhichevan, an increased sense of responsibility for the region and city as well as corresponding donation practices had already developed among the local elite shortly after the city's foundation. In 17 years of the period between 1800 and 1830, large-scale payments by successful merchants into the city coffers exceeded the regular revenues.³⁸ With matters of education, healthcare, or infrastructure delegated to city councils and the *zemstvo* in 1872, conflicts between Rostov and Nakhichevan became more common. They were directly negotiated on the local and regional level and not moderated by the imperial centre anymore.

While the 1860s are considered the “zenith of Armenian-Russian relations” on the imperial level³⁹, Rostov experienced a rise in anti-Armenian sentiment, further fuelled by the nascent local press criticising political autonomy and Nakhichevan's high crime rate.⁴⁰ These regional polemics about the coexistence of different legal and social orders engendered increasingly ambivalent views of the Armenians, who were seen not only as oppressed and loyal brothers in faith, but also as deceitful merchants and, from the 1880s onwards, as insidious revolutionaries.⁴¹ Urban elites in the respective city parliaments frequently displayed open hostility towards the other side: the Armenians feared a union with the neighbouring city and their disempowerment after the abolition of

³⁷ Lutz Häfner, *Gesellschaft als lokale Veranstaltung. Die Wolgastädte Kazan und Saratov (1879-1914)*, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2004.

³⁸ Edik Minasyan/Levon Batiev, “The Name List of ... Cityheads” in Nakhichevan-on-Don and the “Statement of the Costs of City Revenues and Expenditures” (the End 19th–Mid 20th century), in: *Novoe proshloe* 2, 2019, p. 219-230.

³⁹ Cf. Ronald Suny, *Eastern Armenians under Tsarist Rule*, in: Richard Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times. Foreign Dominion to Statehood. The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 2, Basingstoke 1997, p. 109-135, here p. 127.

⁴⁰ Cf. Vladimir Barkhudaryan, *Istoriya armyanskoi kolonii Novaya Nakhichevan' (1779-1917)*, Erevan 1996, p. 332.

⁴¹ Robert Geraci, *Capitalist Stereotypes and the Economic Organization of the Russian Empire. The Case of the Tiflis Armenians*, in: Michael Branch (ed.), *Defining Self. Essays on Emergent Identities in Russia Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, Helsinki 2009, p. 365-381.

privileges and self-government, while some of the delegates of Rostov put forward proposals for a union of the cities, making use of pejorative references to the Armenians' supposed backwardness, isolationism, and traditionalism.

In an era of increasingly powerful nationalisms, economic competition between the two cities could easily be framed in respective categories. Russian nationalism gained further ground when both cities were integrated into the Don Cossack region in 1888. The discrepancy between the Cossacks' symbolic valorisation as bearers of the Russian idea and their fragile socioeconomic status led to a hostile attitude towards modernization and the rejection of economically successful minorities.⁴² This affected the image of Armenian and Jewish populations in Rostov, the latter being targeted during various pogroms in which Cossacks participated. In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, anti-Armenian resentment increased among the rapidly growing group of unskilled workers of peasant origin, who flocked from core Russian regions to find work in both cities.⁴³

Within urban and regional elites, receptivity to nationalist narratives varied. Resistance among Rostov elites against infrastructural projects and economic cooperation was most fierce when the Armenian elites tried to counter Rostov's growing economic preponderance. Several attempts by the Armenian city head Balabanov to establish a new market in Nakhichevan were turned down by local and regional administrations, warning of potential damage to Rostov's markets and fairs. Other parts of the Rostovian elites aimed at excluding their Armenian neighbours and competitors from so-called mutual credit societies in the region, which provided capital to smaller businesses, usually regardless of ethnic origin.⁴⁴

Widespread concern for the preservation of Armenian culture also produced centrifugal tendencies on the Nakhichevan side, with demarcation strategies expressing ethnic differences in architectural forms. New administrative buildings of the 1870s and 1880s displayed continuity with the classicist architectural empire style of the eighteenth century. However, residential buildings erected in the last three decades of the nineteenth century were characterised by the frequent use of traditional Armenian design features.⁴⁵ In the construction

⁴² Cf. Alexander Maslov/Vyacheslav Volchik, *Institutions and Lagging Development. The Case of the Don Army Region*, in: *Journal of Economic Issues* 48:3, 2014, p. 727-742; Boris Kornienko, *Pravyi Don. Kazaki i ideologiya natsionalizma (1909–1914)*, St. Petersburg 2013.

⁴³ Cf. Samarina, p. 381.

⁴⁴ Cf. Aleksandr Grekov, *Priazov'e i Don. Ocherki obshchestvennoi i ekonomicheskoi zhizni kraya*, St Petersburg 1912, p. 107.

⁴⁵ Ol'ga Vladimirovna Baeva, *Severnyi modern v zhiloi arkhitekture Nakhichevani-na-Donu*, in: *Khudozhestvennaya Kul'tura* 3, 2019, p. 262-277.

of the Surb Karapet church between 1875 and 1881, the architects consciously used medieval Armenian building traditions and design features in order to connect symbolically to earlier cultural traditions.⁴⁶

5. Conclusion

Nakhichevan-on-Don was a unique project of eighteenth-century Russian imperial settlement and urban planning. A mono-ethnic Armenian community established a flourishing trade and production centre that had an impact far beyond the lower Don region. Ironically, the very trade networks and market relations established by the Armenians laid the foundation for Rostov's incipient rise as its main competitor. The pragmatic openness to multi-ethnic migrants in Rostov that prevailed from the 1830s onwards proved more successful than Nakhichevan's mono-ethnic model and generated dynamic growth that attracted capital of the most diverse origins around the turn of the twentieth century. The process of replacing Nakhichevan as the dominant economic centre also attests to the socioeconomic dynamic in the Empire's southern realm prior to the Great Reforms, which contrasted with the premises of autocratic top-down urban policy. Unlike cities such as Odessa and Nakhichevan, Rostov no longer required extensive state planning, subsidies and interventions, the relocation of the customs posts in 1836 being one noticeable exception. Following on from the abolition of self-government in the late 1860s, relations between the mono-ethnic Nakhichevan and its multi-ethnic neighbour required re-negotiation. Within the regional economy, a new form of interethnic division of labour emerged. The continuous existence of two political cities contributed, however, to prevent the displacement of established ethnic groups from positions of power, as happened to the Baltic Germans in Riga or the Armenians in Tbilisi in the nineteenth century. Both the increasing prosperity of the metropolis and the national cleavages kept at bay by the local elites made an administrative unification into one city not an absolutely essential project.

This article has explored the gravitational and centrifugal forces affecting the multi-ethnic and socially stratified populations of the region. Despite sometimes deep-seated mutual mistrust between elites, individual entrepreneurs and political representatives were able to initiate joint infrastructure projects, which metaphorically and literally built bridges across the political borders between Rostov and Nakhichevan. These contributed to the socialization (*Vergesellschaftung*) of an urban society. Centrifugal forces as an expression of communalization (*Vergemeinschaftung*) can be observed in Nakhichevan among

⁴⁶ Ivanova-Ilicheva/Stushniaia/Baeva.

those who considered culture as a remaining and threatened beacon of Armenian identity. Narratives of Russian superiority over Armenians were more prevalent among those who felt excluded from modernization processes, among unskilled worker migrants from core regions of the Empire and among the Don Cossacks. However, cross-ethnic economic cooperation among elites placed limits on such nationalist narratives and helped to maintain a balance between urban and national identity until the end of the Empire.