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Urban historical analysis of the emergence and development of Bishkek

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Abstract. Following the Presidential Decree of the Kyrgyz Republic dated 29 December 2023 on the expansion of the administrative-territorial boundaries of Bishkek, by analogy with cities such as Moscow, New Delhi, and Greater London, this territorial enlargement has given rise to numerous urban planning challenges and has exacerbated existing issues affecting the vital interests of the population. With the extension of the urban area, multiple questions emerge regarding the city's historical reference framework, including the integration of newly incorporated monuments of historical, cultural, landscape, and other significance. The aim of this study was to establish the theoretical foundations for the rational, economically efficient, and anticipatory development of the capital of Kyrgyzstan. The research employed historical-chronological and historical-urban analyses (comparing master plans from 1878 to 2025), a systematic interdisciplinary approach (considering natural, climatic, and seismic factors), a comparative-historical method, and critical analysis of primary sources. The study revealed that the regular rectangular street grid of Pishpek in 1878 established a resilient framework for contemporary Bishkek. It analysed the stages of transformation of the urban layout during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, and examined the influence of natural and geographical conditions (topography, rivers, seismic risk) on urban form. It was determined that early "garden city" projects (radial-ring layouts of the 1920s-1930s) retain value for green infrastructure and urban ventilation. Furthermore, the research confirmed the necessity of integrating historical and cultural heritage values in the updating of the city's master plan. The results of this study provide actionable insights for urban planning authorities in Bishkek in the development and updating of the master plan, as well as for academic and educational institutions in formulating strategies for the sustainable development of the capital

Keywords: Kokand and Pishpek fortress; city plan; master plan; architectural and planning structure of the city; territorial development

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■ Introduction

Bishkek, as the centre of the Chui agglomeration, necessitates a comprehensive review of the system and structure of the Chui-Bishkek metropolitan area, taking into account its role as the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic. At the same time, maintaining ecological balance, ensuring urban ventilation, and enhancing heat resilience require a targeted interdisciplinary approach. The stable functioning and sustainable prospective development of Bishkek, considering its territorial and spatial expansion – encompassing an updated, enlarged, modern, creative, urbanised, green, and growing city – remains a pressing issue in the contemporary context of Kyrgyzstan.

The historical and urban analysis conducted between 2015 and 2025, along with the graphical master plans of the city under its three different names across distinct developmental periods, demonstrates the territorial and spatial evolution of Bishkek. This work, carried out at the Department of Urban Planning of the Kyrgyz State Technical University named after I. Razzakov, was reflected in the study by Y.S. Mazmanov & T.S. Keneshov (2023). The information presented, together with other historical and archaeological research, calls for further detailed analysis and systematic consolidation, free from partisan-Soviet ideological frameworks, to establish an accurate chronology of historical events based on historical-cultural evidence, while clarifying and preserving tangible and intangible cultural values. At the same time, comparative studies from other countries addressing similar challenges in cultural identity, the preservation of historical heritage, and the development of historic cities are highly relevant and informative.

The study by S.L. Farhan *et al.* (2024) presented an analytical review of contemporary strategies for the revitalisation of historic urban centres. The authors highlighted the significance of local distinctiveness and the socio-cultural context, emphasising the preservation of historic buildings, the adaptation of older housing stock to contemporary needs, the reconstruction of lost urban elements to maintain ensemble integrity, and the introduction of new architectural elements or functions to invigorate districts or historic environments. They also discussed the concept of replacement as a method for creating harmonious urban cores through the removal of dilapidated or visually discordant structures. S.L. Farhan *et al.* (2024) stressed that there is no universal formula for conserving historic centres; each case requires a context-sensitive approach that strengthens local identity and promotes community well-being. They emphasised the importance of balancing heritage preservation with the introduction of new functions to enhance neighbourhood vitality, noting that the consideration of public opinion is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of revitalisation strategies.

R. Privitera & G. Jelo (2025) examined the adaptation of historic urban centres to climate change, using the historic core of Catania, Italy, as a case study. Like many

historic centres, Catania features dense development, limited green spaces, predominance of private property, and high vulnerability to natural hazards. Climate change exacerbates issues such as urban heat islands and storm water flooding. Nature-based solutions (NbS), including street greening, parks, and water bodies, are proposed as mitigation strategies. Implementation in historic cores is constrained by density and heritage protection regulations. The study identified specific locations – such as municipal building courtyards – where NbS could be introduced without compromising heritage values, enabling the development of a comprehensive plan for integrating green infrastructure into the historic centre. This approach highlighted how climate-sensitive urban planning can be aligned with conservation goals, offering insights applicable to similar historic contexts, including cities like Bishkek.

G. Marzani *et al.* (2025) developed a roadmap for reducing seismic vulnerability in historic urban areas. Their study, conducted across six countries in the seismically active Adriatic-Ionian region, proposes a three-phase methodology for planning and implementing seismic risk mitigation in historic cities. This methodology structures the transition from selecting individual measures to developing comprehensive strategies, ultimately enhancing community resilience by protecting cultural heritage. By reducing the risk of damage to monuments and historic quarters, it preserves urban identity while minimizing potential losses. Such an approach underscored the importance of integrating seismic risk assessment into urban planning for historic cities. For contexts like Bishkek, where seismic activity and historic urban layers intersect, adopting a structured methodology could inform the development of heritage-sensitive risk management plans, ensuring both safety and preservation of the city's cultural and historical fabric.

The digital reconstruction of urban evolution based on historical maps, as demonstrated in the study by P.Y. Mu *et al.* (2024) on Suzhou, China, provides a compelling example of integrating historical cartographic data with modern digital tools. Suzhou, a renowned “water city” with an extensive canal network, was analysed using a unique historical map – the 13th-century “Pingjiang Map” depicting the city during the Southern Song period. The study aimed to model the city's evolution across time and space, employing a combination of historical GIS (H-GIS) and historical BIM (H-BIM). Despite wars and subsequent reconstructions, the analysis identified which urban elements persisted, which disappeared, and which proved resilient or transformed, revealing evolutionary connections over centuries. Digital modelling provided insights into restoration practices and urban management strategies, demonstrating that historical maps serve as planning instruments reflecting imperial ideology and urban governance. Applied to Bishkek, this approach underlines the potential of combining

historical cartographic records, such as 19th-century Pishpek plans, with contemporary digital methods to analyse urban evolution. Such integration can inform the development of predictive, economically rational, and heritage-sensitive urban plans, enabling the city to preserve its historical layers while accommodating future growth, infrastructure development, and sustainable urban strategies.

Materials and Methods

The primary source materials for the historical-logical analysis consisted of well-known historical accounts and the results of archaeological investigations of burial mounds and medieval settlements in the Chui Valley, carried out by the Institute of Archaeology of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences in the second half of the 20th century (Goryacheva, 1988). These sources allowed the development of Bishkek to be examined in relation to historical, urban, and socio-natural factors in chronological sequence. In addition to archaeological plans and reconstructions of individual historical monuments based on excavation results conducted by archaeological expeditions, the analysis also drew upon the first topographic surveys at scale, executed by military topographers of the Russian Empire in the mid-19th century. The cartographic data depicted and described by the topographers made it possible to reconstruct the historical reality of the city of Pishpek (now Bishkek). These topographic maps and surveys allowed for the comparison of the street network, green axes, and street profile parameters, thereby revealing continuity and patterns in the city's historical development. Descriptions and symbols contained in these historical cartographic materials were thoroughly examined, enabling precise orientation in contemporary conditions with reference to the recorded names of rivers, valleys, mountainous terrain, settlements, and other geographic features. The evidential value is further reinforced by historical and cultural accounts of travellers and scholars, which allowed for the consideration of natural and climatic factors, including seismicity, the hydrology of the Ala-Archa and Alamidin rivers, and microclimatic conditions such as ventilation and heat resistance.

For the purposes of urban analysis, the primary source material comprised the master plan schemes of the city under study, beginning with the 1878 plan and subsequent revisions produced by various authors (Nusov, 1971). These materials allowed for the tracing of the city's spatial and territorial development, the evolution of urban axes with the integration of new elements into the planning structure, and the reflection of attempts to implement progressive urban planning concepts. The historical-urban analysis enabled a clear linkage between urban design decisions and the specific historical conditions and requirements of their respective periods. An interdisciplinary approach was employed to consider the combined influence of

natural-geographical, socio-economic, and cultural conditions in the analysis of Bishkek's urban development. The city's natural features, seismic conditions, and climatic factors were carefully taken into account. Ecological considerations were also integrated, including the preservation of green spaces and urban ventilation, which are critical for the sustainable development of the capital. This approach provided a foundation for formulating scientifically grounded principles for resilient and safe spatial development. The comparative analysis with other cities, including Moscow, New Delhi, and London, was conducted to justify the relevance and scale of the capital's development challenges. The comparative-historical method enabled the identification of patterns and challenges in the territorial growth of major cities, drawing on international experience in urban planning.

Results

On the present-day territory of Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, archaeological and historical evidence indicates human presence dating back to deep antiquity, specifically the 5th-4th millennia Before the Common Era (BCE). In the surrounding areas, numerous archaeological monuments from the Bronze and Iron Ages have been preserved, including kurgan burial mounds of the Usun and Saka cultures, spanning the 7th-3rd centuries BCE to the 5th century Common Era. During the medieval period, nomadic and semi-sedentary agricultural communities inhabited the basins of the Alamidin and Ala-Archa rivers. Monuments of these nomadic peoples include burial mounds, stone statues, and the eroded remains of walls and fortifications of settlements. Many of these archaeological sites, which constitute significant historical and material value, remain beneath the rapidly expanding modern urban fabric and, regrettably, have not been preserved. Historical and archaeological data remain largely unstructured, and results from field and archival studies conducted during the Soviet era have not been systematically integrated into contemporary information resources.

During the medieval period, settlements evolved into towns, preserved in the form of "tortkuls" (fortified mounds). Specifically, the Pishpek Settlement, composed of numerous tortkuls and dating from the 7th to the 12th centuries CE, was one of the major medieval towns in the Chui Valley. The site covered approximately 30 km² and included areas corresponding to the modern Pishpek railway station and the former villages of Klyuchevoe and Kyzyl-Asker (currently within the urban boundaries of Bishkek). The town featured a complex spatial layout and a well-developed system of fortifications. Another ancient settlement, the "Kuznechnaya Fortress" (named in the 19th century), was located in the Alamidin river basin and occupied an area defined by the boundaries of the historic cultural layer, corresponding to the modern streets of Abdumomunov and Orozbekov, the Karagachy Grove, and the Alamidin river, with its centre in the area of the

Kokand fortress of Pishpek. From the 8th century onwards, these settlements gradually declined in significance.

On the modern city plan of Bishkek, primarily based on the works of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic, including archaeological research (Kozhemyako, 1959), five towns with substantial

territories are identified: the Klyuchevskoe Settlement, the Kuznechnaya Settlement with the Pishpek Fortress, the town of Tarsakent, the town of Pokap with five fortified mounds, and the town of Djul. In addition, more than 15 other settlements existed between these towns, which are also represented as “tortkuls” (Fig. 1).

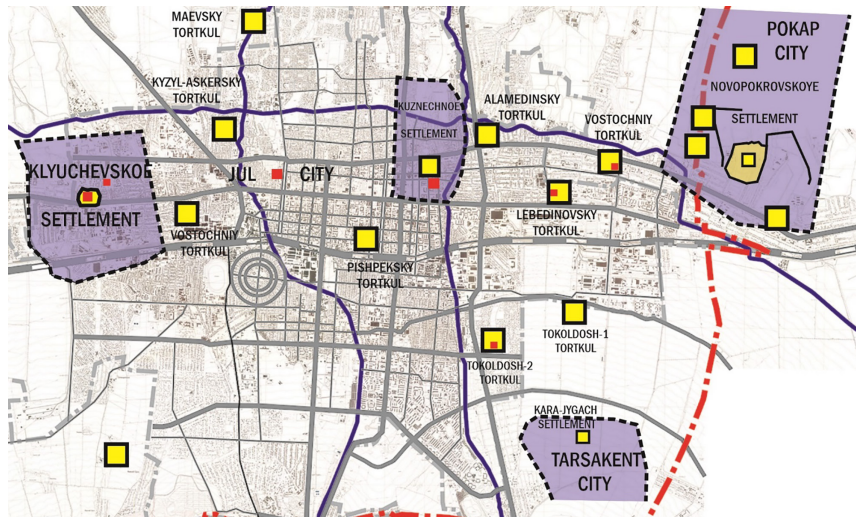


Figure 1. Medieval fortified settlements on the territory of modern Bishkek

Source: created by the authors

The archaeological map shows that the territory of the Kuznechnaya Settlement with the Pishpek Fortress is surrounded on all sides by both large and small-fortified settlements, known locally as “tortkuls.” The large settlements include the Klyuchevskoe Settlement and the town of Djul to the west, Tarsakent to the south, and Pokap with five smaller settlements to the east. The smaller settlements, or “tortkuls,” comprise Maevskoe, Kyzyl-Askerskoe, Shish-Tobe, Pishpekskoe, Alamedinskoe, Tokoldosh-1 and Tokoldosh-2, Lebedinovskoe, Vostochnoye, among others. The term “tortkul” (a rarely used historical Kyrgyz term) literally means “quadrangle” and refers to a settlement with remnants of urban structures (Karasaev, 2009). The historical settlements located within the present-day territory of Bishkek were situated at the foothills of the Kyrgyz Ala-Too, the largest mountain system in the northern part of the country, at the centre of the Chui Valley (Goryacheva, 1988). The town of Djul and several smaller fortified settlements occupied the lowland areas, at altitudes ranging from 3,000 to 4,800 metres above sea level, encompassing what is now the entire territory of the modern capital city, which is currently undergoing intensive urban development.

The Ala-Archa and Alamedin rivers originate on the mountain slopes, with water volumes varying according to the four seasons. They flow through the city’s territory and discharge into the Chu River, which runs from east to west in a latitudinal direction. The city and its suburbs has long been by the presence of five large geomorphological belts stretching in a latitudinal direction and a

high seismic hazard throughout the entire area of the Chui Basin. A strong earthquake was recorded on 3 August 1885, measuring approximately 8 on the Richter scale (Abdyraeva & Malybaeva, 2020). This natural factor, together with other circumstances, has had a profound impact on the preservation of ancient sites and the development of cities in Kyrgyzstan.

The Chui Valley, in the centre of which lies Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, has been inhabited since ancient times, and the presence of “early medieval settlements”, according to the archaeologist V.D. Goryacheva (1988) as shown in Figure 2, is one of the evidences of the existence of ancient cities in Kyrgyzstan. Archaeological evidence indicates that by the 10th-12th centuries, the Chui Valley contained more than 60 ancient settlements. Historical sources show that in the 15th century, merchants visited the cities in the Chui Valley, long established along the caravan routes of the Silk Road, from various regions of both the East and the West.

In the 1820s and 1830s, Kyrgyzstan was ruled by the Kokand (Kyrgyz) Khanate, which built a series of military fortifications serving as strategic outposts of the khanate in Merke (present-day territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan), Chaldovar, Shish-Tobe (modern-day Karabalta), Ak-Suu, and Tokmak. In 1825, on the famous Silk Road – the ancient trade route connecting Central Asia with China – at the intersection with the Vernensky tract, the official Lyashkar Kumbegi, acting on the orders of Modali Khan, founded the fortress of Pishpek (Ploskikh, 1977), which was one of the main strongholds

of the khanate. Originally, the fortress occupied an area of approximately six hectares in the northeastern sector of the city, to the west of the Alamedin River. At present, remnants of the earthen rampart are observable as a

slight elevation above the adjacent built-up areas. Archaeological survey plans and illustrations indicate that the fortress was laid out as an irregular quadrangle, with sides exceeding 200 metres in length. (Fig. 3).

Наименование городищ	Размер центр. развалин	Дата появления и время запустения	Предполагаемое отождествление
Ак-Бешимское	прибл. 1500 x 1200 м	V—VI в. — XI в.	Суяб-Ордукент
Краснореченское	1500 x 800 м	VI—VII—XII вв.	Навекат
Шини-Тюбе	550 x 500 м	VI—XII вв.	Нузкет
Беловодское	500 x 300 м	VIII—XIII вв.	Харранджуван
Сокулукское	500 x 250 м	VI—XIV вв.	Джуль (Байпаков)
Грозненское	750 x 300 м	IX/X—XII вв.	Сарыг (Байпаков)
Кузнечная крепость	прибл. 500 x 300 м	VII—XI вв.	Джуль (Горячева)
Чумышское	340 x 170 м	VII—X вв.	Столица тюрк. кагана (Байпаков)
Милянфанское	480 x 480 м	VIII—XI вв.	Сарыг (Горячева)
Новопокровское	320 x 300 м	VII—XII вв.	Кирмирау (Байпаков)
Кысмычи	400 x 300 м	VII—XIII вв.	Пакап-Столица тюрк. кагана (Горячева)
Караджигачское	разрушено	IX/X—XIV вв.	Бунджикат
Буранинское	600 x 580 м	X—XIV вв.	Тарсакент
Ключевское	200 x 160 м	VII—XII вв.	Баласагун (Куз-Орду, Куз-Балык)
Александровское	140 x 100 м	VII—XII вв.	
Каиндинское	разрушено	VII—XII вв.	
Степнинское Ак-Тюбе	300 x 250 м	VIII/IX—XII вв.	
Тюлекское	прибл. 300 x 200 м	IX/X—XII вв.	
Сретенское	240 x 220 м	IX/X—XII вв.	
Полтавское	прибл. 300 x 190 м	IX—XII вв.	

Figure 2. Comparative table of early medieval settlements in the Chuy Valley

Source: V.D. Goryacheva (1988)

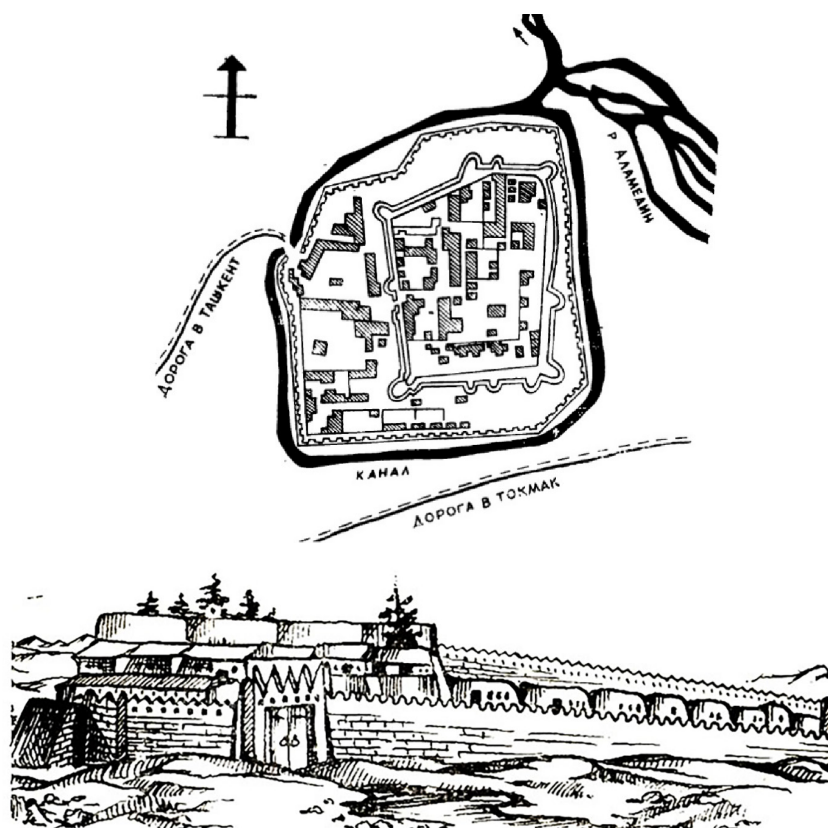


Figure 3. Plan and view of the Kokand fortress Pishpek

Source: V.E. Nusov (1971)

The outer walls of the fortress rose to over 5 metres in height, with a base thickness of up to 10 metres. They were equipped with loopholes and embrasures, and the perimeter was encircled by a water-filled moat. The inner walls were substantially higher than the outer walls and were strengthened by corner towers, or bastions. A series of crenellations ran along the summit of the formidable rammed-earth walls. The main entrance to the fortress was situated on its western side. Within the fortress were stationed the khanate has armed men, numbering approximately 500 sabres, along with tax collectors serving the khanate. Surrounding the fortress were caravanserais, workshops of blacksmiths and craftsmen, as well as residential quarters. The street where blacksmiths and other craftsmen lived was called Kuznechnaya (now S. Ibrahimov Street; prior to renaming, it was named after the Soviet party newspaper – Pravda Street). The name of this part of the city historically originated from the occupation and residence of the blacksmiths of that period.

According to the data of V.M. Ploskikh (1977), historian and academician of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic, based on documentary evidence, the construction of Pishpek by the Kokandians can be attributed with a high degree of reliability to the year 1825. In the autumn of the same year, Faizula Seyfullin, the agent of the Semipalatinsk merchant S. Popov, while in Eastern Turkestan with goods, reported that over 3,000 people, by order of the Kokand ruler, had founded a new city near the settlements of the “wild-stone Kyrgyz”. The official republican publication (Oruzbaieva, 1982),

in its chronology of major historical events, records that “1825 – the foundation of the Kokand fortress Pishpek in the Chui Valley”. However, in numerous historical and scholarly works, no descriptions or specific details concerning the Pishpek fortress are provided for this date. Drawing on the available historical and archaeological materials concerning the Pishpek fortress, in 1988-1989, at the initiative of Frunze Main Architecture (now the State Institution “Bishkek Main Architecture”), the Frunze City Council of Workers resolved to relocate 100 families residing in illegally constructed rammed-earth houses in the upper part of the Pishpek fortress site to the then-under-construction “Tunguch” microdistrict.

It should be emphasised, for a proper understanding and discussion of historical events, that the Kokand Khanate was originally a Kyrgyz khanate. Nevertheless, due to the distorted interpretation of historical facts by Soviet-era historians – commonly referred to as the “party-class approach” to all vital issues, including the territorial assignment of the Fergana Valley to the Turkestan region – the khanate, and later the city of Kokand, came to be known as the “Kokand Khanate” and is subsequently associated with Uzbekistan. The renowned Kyrgyz-Soviet writer Tologon Kasymbekov, published in 1966, provides a detailed and chronological account in the historical novel Syngan Kylych (The Broken Sword) a work that has been cited in historical studies (Abdurakhmanova, 2018). The Khudoyar-Khan Palace in the city of Kokand, constructed between 1845 and 1869, is designated as a tangible cultural heritage monument in the Republic of Uzbekistan (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. The Palace of Khudoyar Khan in the city of Kokand

Source: Palace of Khudáyár Khán (n.d.)

In the course of historical events, during Tsarist Russia's advance into Central Asia and its clashes with the forces of the Kokand Khanate, the Pishpek fortress was

stormed and captured on 4 September 1860 by a military detachment from the city of Verny (present-day Almaty). Following the withdrawal of the Russian forces,

the Kokand troops reoccupied Pishpek and reinforced its fortifications. In September 1862, a group of Kyrgyz from the Chui and Issyk-Kul regions rose against the Kokand Khanate, laid siege to Pishpek, and appealed to representatives of Tsarist Russia in the city of Verny for assistance. In 1863, with the elimination of the Kokand Khanate's authority, Kyrgyzstan became part of the Russian Empire. To commemorate this event, the Monument of Friendship of Peoples was erected in 1974 (sculptors T. Sadykov, Z. Khabibulin, O.B. Bakashev; architect A. Nezhrin) to mark the 100th anniversary of Kyrgyzstan's incorporation into Russia.

Between 1865 and 1867, the Chui Valley and the city of Pishpek were incorporated into the Turkestan Region and were subsequently assigned to the Semirechye Region within the Tokmak Uyezd. In 1867, the Russian Empire established regular postal communication between the cities of Tashkent and Verny, with a postal station

in Pishpek serving as a horse-and-post relay point. The name was later retained in both the railway station and the city itself. These historical dates are of particular importance, evidencing the revolutionary-evolutionary development of the city in the nineteenth century within a geopolitical framework. Pishpek, regarded as the most promising and geographically advantageous stronghold, consequently became a district centre, with all district administrative institutions, offices, and other authorities transferred from Tokmak. The dedicated project was initiated in 1869 to substantiate the decision regarding the relocation city. For this purpose, military topographers, the results of which have been preserved in the city's historical records, undertook a topographic survey of the Pishpek area. Based on this survey, a "Planned Layout" of the town of Pishpek was devised and subsequently ratified by the Military Governor of the Semirechye Region, G. A. Kolpakovsky, on 31 August 1878. (Fig. 5).

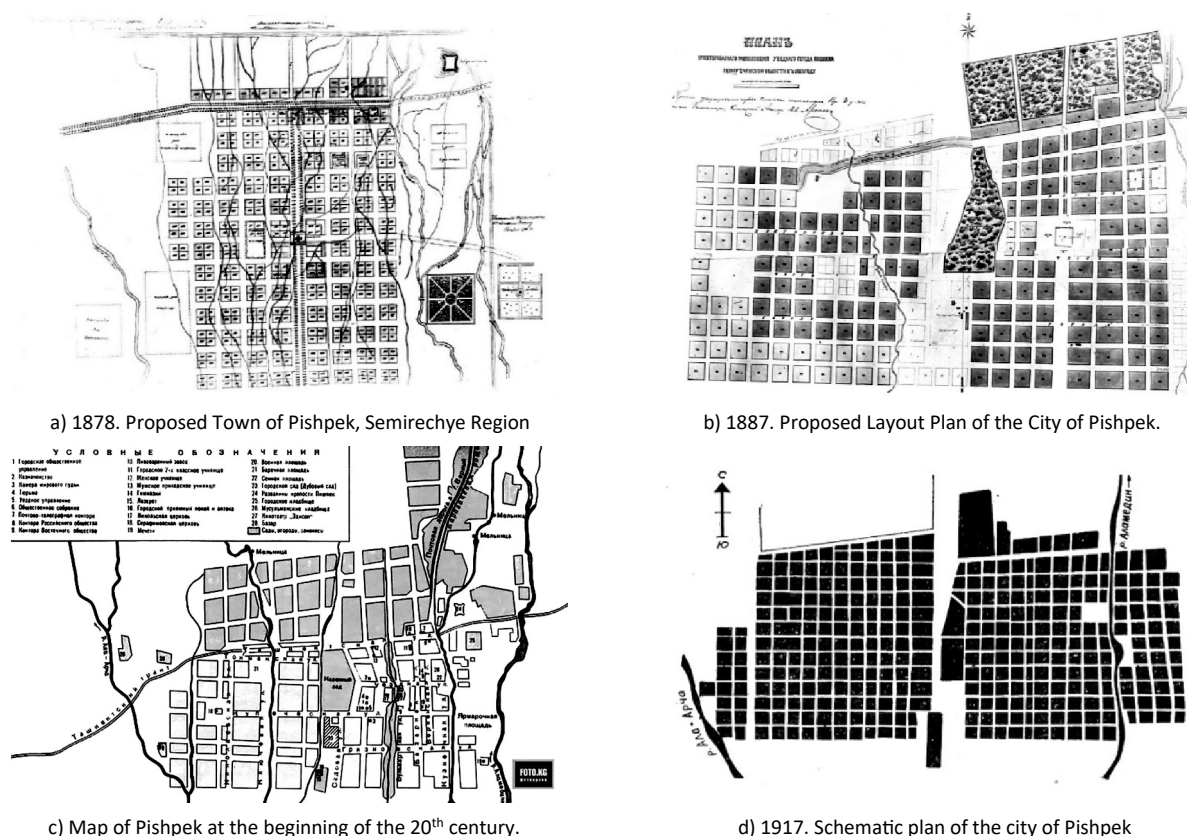


Figure 5. Development of Pishpek-Frunze, 1878-1917

Source: a, b, d – V.E. Nusov (1971), c) – The map of Pishpek at the beginning of the XX century (n.d.)

The year 1878, when the master plan was ratified, marks the commencement of the historical age of the city of Pishpek, which was later renamed Frunze in 1925 and Bishkek in 1991. A comparison of the master plans prepared at various stages of the city's development reveals that the dimensions of the urban layout, particularly in the central area, have remained largely consistent. The urban gardens, later transformed into public parks,

were laid out along a meridional axis in the eastern and western parts of the city. Initiated by local residents through the establishment of an irrigation network, they played a formative role in shaping the city's green infrastructure, encompassing both its street network and public spaces. The integration of the Pishpek fortress into the city's spatial framework and its interconnection with the wider urban system illustrate the principle of

morphological continuity in the city's development. In the first master plan, the cross-sectional parameters of streets, structured through four hierarchical dimensions and preserved within the historic core, continue to sustain longitudinal vertical landscaping supported by an irrigation network.

When comparing the founding dates of well-known historic cities, certain analogies may be drawn. For example, as noted by one of Moscow's prominent architects and urban planners, S.B. Tkachenko (2018), "In 1147, Prince Yuri Dolgoruky of Suzdal, son of Vladimir Monomakh, established a small wooden watch fortress on the elevated left bank of the Moskva River, at the confluence with the Neglinnaya River. Due to its advantageous strategic position, the fortress controlled access from the south into the territory of the Suzdal Principality. Thus, the Moscow Kremlin was founded. According to the Hypatian Chronicle, it is from this moment that the history of Moscow begins. This date is officially recognised as the city's year of foundation". Another example is the city of Osh, the southern capital of the Kyrgyz Republic. Based on the scholarly works of Yu.A. Zadneprovsky, the city's 3,000th anniversary was officially celebrated at the state level in the summer of 2000 (Resolution of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 277, 2000).

In preparation for the anniversary celebrations in Osh, large-scale urban regeneration measures were implemented, including landscaping, greening, artistic enhancement of the city – particularly in its central areas – and the development of cultural and sports facilities. These interventions, despite the challenges of Kyrgyzstan's post- "shock therapy" transition to a market economy, enabled the organisation of a state-level event that served as a catalyst for the socio-economic revitalisation of the southern capital. However, following the commemoration of Osh's 3,000th anniversary, no comparable events have been held on a regular basis over the subsequent twenty-five years.

The classification of the city of Frunze among the historical cities of the Soviet Union is noted on page 249 of the book "Historical Cities of the USSR", published in 1987 by the Central Research Institute for the Theory and History of Architecture (Baranov, 1987). This further underscores that the city of Bishkek (formerly Frunze) should be regarded as one with an ancient and continuous historical existence, possessing its own original chronological reference points that mark the commencement of its historical timeline. At the same time, it remains plausible to associate the origins of the city with the medieval period, specifically with the emergence of the town of Djul. Nevertheless, the lack of exposed and preserved archaeological sites or standalone structures within the territory of Bishkek precludes establishing a historically verifiable starting point for the city's urban development.

The official solemn celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region as part of

the Soviet Union in 2024 (Resolution of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 270, 2023) is a concrete step towards systematising and establishing historical events and dates at the state level for further use and, if necessary, conducting further comprehensive scientific research and historical and cultural studies on specific topical issues. At the same time, the official event held in 2024 allowed for active work, including in the city of Bishkek, to define the 200-year history of the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, officially at the state and inter-state level in 2025.

Historical-urban analysis, applied here to the case of Bishkek, serves as a key methodological instrument within the theoretical framework of urban planning, particularly in relation to questions of urban morphology and heritage-oriented development. To achieve the research objectives, the study employs a systems approach, integrated with other fundamental methodological perspectives used in contemporary urban-planning scholarship and practice. The history of the evolution of scientific thought demonstrates that systematic and goal-oriented analysis is essential for determining the object and subject of research. An examination of the first master plan of Pishpek (1878), together with the topographic foundations drawn up by military surveyors, reveals that the city's initial morphology was shaped by the functional requirements of a military settlement – designed as a "frontier outpost" on the remote margins of the Russian Empire. The city's spatial organisation was conceived as an orthogonal grid, with streets aligned along meridional and latitudinal axes and subdivided into regular urban blocks. This rationalist approach to planning, and its subsequent implementation, provided a lasting framework for the city's evolution, ensuring a gradual and orderly occupation of urban land in accordance with the master plan. Notably, the document can be regarded as an early attempt at integrating resilience into urban design, as it implicitly accounted for geographical, seismic and hydrogeological conditions, while also promoting the sustainable management of local water resources

By 1898, Pishpek hosted several industrial establishments, including two leather factories, an oil mill, three wine cellars and a tavern. The production buildings and structures, while serving their utilitarian purposes, were architecturally and structurally rudimentary. According to information provided by the city head, Ilya Terentyev, at that time there were 752 houses constructed from a variety of materials for walls, roofs, and other structural elements (Muksinov & Khramova, 2010). The further development of the city was significantly influenced by Pishpek's (Bishkek's) favourable geographical location, serving as the centre of the Chui Valley. The urban population experienced notable growth: from 6,615 inhabitants in 1897 to 20,102 by 1913. At the same time, the planting of trees in the Oak Park in the city centre was organised. Among the century-old trees stand sculptures

by prominent Soviet-era architects of the 1980s and by participants of numerous sculptor-artist workshops, organised by the renowned sculptor Turgunbay Sadykov (People's Artist of the USSR, Academician of the Union Academy of Arts, and National Hero of Kyrgyzstan and of Labour of the Soviet Union).

By the late 1920s, following the October Revolution and the establishment of Soviet authority, Kyrgyzstan experienced an intensive phase of urban development, including the construction of industrial and socio-cultural facilities, as well as the landscaping and greening of streets and public squares. At this time, Pishpek accommodated ten industrial enterprises, while key transport arteries – Pishpek-Rybachye (present-day Balykchy) and Pishpek-Verny (present-day Almaty, Kazakhstan) – underwent reconstruction. Additionally, the city initiated the construction of hydroelectric power stations on the Alamedin River, reflecting a coordinated effort to integrate industrial, infrastructural, and urban planning objectives. In 1923, at the initiative of V. I. Lenin, the cooperative Interhelpo (“mutual aid”) was established in the Czechoslovak town of Žilina. On 24 April 1924, 360 of its members arrived in Kyrgyzstan. The cooperative was allocated 43 hectares of land in the western part of Pishpek, where a range of industrial enterprises was constructed, including a cloth factory, a leather plant, mechanical and carpentry workshops, and power stations. During this period, in the southwestern part of the city, the construction of the “Sunny Settlement” for railway workers was initiated – known as the Rabochiy Gorodok (“Workers’ Settlement”). This initiative was intended to implement in Pishpek the ideas of the “Garden Cities of To-morrow” (Howard, 1911) of the English philosopher and social utopian Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928). The planning structure of the Sunny, circular settlement comprised 24 radial streets and four concentric arterial roads.

The first ring road separated the central square from the residential area. The subsequent ring roads divided the housing quarters, while the third (wider) road was envisaged as a boulevard ring. The radial streets, designed as rays converging compositionally towards the centre of the circle, structured the quarters of single-storey housing. The public and cultural facilities planned within the scheme were only partially constructed, with numerous urban planning infringements evident. There were attempts to combine conditions of urban comfort with elements of the green landscape, and from the 1930s onwards this feature was perceived in all master plans of the city as an original emblem – a symbol embedded in the architectural and planning structure of the capital. (Fig. 6).

Subsequently, in 1924, following the national-territorial delimitation of the peoples of Central Asia and the establishment of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region, the city of Pishpek was proclaimed its capital. On 1 February 1926, it assumed the status of the capital of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. That same year – on 12 May 1926 – the city was renamed Frunze by resolution of both local and central authorities, in honour of Mikhail Vasilyevich Frunze, a distinguished Soviet military leader and native son of the city. For over six decades, the capital bore the name Frunze, until 26 April 1991, when the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan solemnly resolved to restore its historical identity under the name Bishkek (Resolution of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan No. 374-XII, 1991). For more than thirty years, there were differing interpretations and explanations regarding the meaning of the name Bishkek – beginning with the term and historical name “Pishpek”. It was only after the erection and official unveiling of the monument to Bishkek Baatyr in 2022 (at the intersection of Erkindik Boulevard and Chui Avenue) that the search for a definitive interpretation of the city’s name largely subsided.

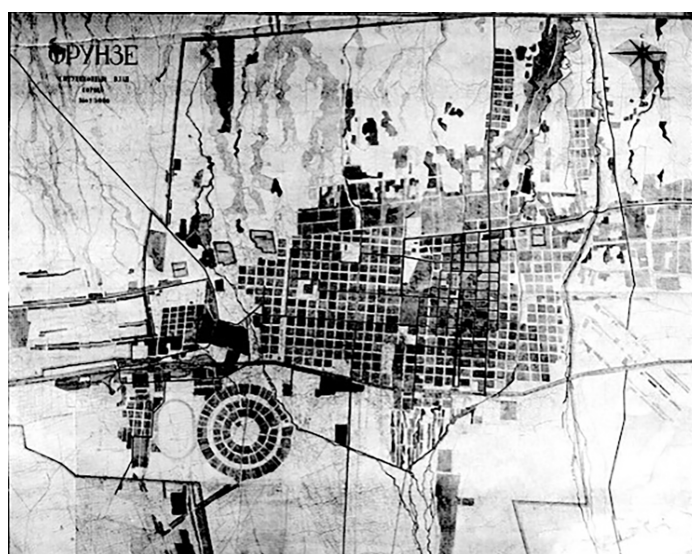


Figure 6. Plan of Pishpek, 1930s

Source: Ya.S. Mazmanov & T.S. Keneshov (2023)

Throughout Bishkek's two centuries of historical evolution, beginning in 1878, the preparation of master plans has served as a key instrument for ensuring systematic and continuous urban development, particularly in terms of territorial and spatial planning. The validity of the most recent Master Plan, prepared by the Kyrgyz Research and Design Institute (Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 805, 2006), expired in 2024. Its implementation under market conditions produced an ambivalent outcome: while the city expanded territorially and demonstrated growth, this process simultaneously exposed and intensified challenges relating to the development of engineering networks, transport systems, and socio-cultural infrastructure.

Discussion

This study aligns closely with A.M. Refaat's (2025) research on the historical core of Assiut, Egypt, with both emphasising the importance of morphological analysis and the role of historical continuity in urban planning. Both works recognised the historic urban fabric as a resource for guiding future urban development, considering cultural heritage, natural conditions, and the potential to enhance urban liveability. The primary methodological distinction is that A.M. Refaat (2025) employed contemporary analytical techniques, including Space Syntax to assess street connectivity and sociological surveys to examine spatial perception and use. In contrast, the present study relied on comparative analysis, providing insights into historical urban structures that can inform future planning strategies.

Chinese researchers B. Feng & W. Li (2025) investigated the interconnections among dispersed historical and cultural sites in the city of Dunhuang. In a manner comparable to the present study on Bishkek, their research highlighted the influence of landscape and natural factors on urban development, employing the historic urban landscape (HUL) approach. The similarity with this study lies in the explicit consideration of the natural and landscape environment as a determinant of urban form. However, B. Feng & W. Li (2025) utilised algorithmic GIS modelling, which allowed them to identify probable pathways for the evolution of historical interconnections among heritage sites within the framework of contemporary urbanisation, and to establish a coherent focus that links these dispersed heritage assets into an integrated system. These methodological insights offered valuable guidance for the management and planning of historic urban landscapes in other contexts, including the systematic preservation and adaptive reuse of historical fabric within ongoing urban development.

Researchers from Iran and Germany, S.L. Farhan *et al.* (2024), conducted an integrative review of the literature on historical urban centres in order to identify key principles and policies for sustainable revitalisation. The present research aligned with their findings in emphasising the value of historical and cultural heritage and its

role in contemporary urban development. S.L. Farhan *et al.* (2024) argued that the transformation of historic urban cores should be grounded in their cultural and social significance, with particular emphasis on preserving monuments and reviving the spirit of place. Like the present study, they contend that the historical layers of the city should remain legible within its contemporary urban form. The distinction lies in the research outcomes: while S.L. Farhan *et al.* (2024) proposed strategies and techniques for preservation, restoration, and modernisation at the micro-scale – treating historic centres as compact nodes within the wider city – this article underscores the importance of situating such approaches within a broader territorial and spatial framework. From this perspective, their principles could be extended and applied to the planning of larger-scale urban transformations, where historical urban fabrics are seen not only as isolated nodes but as integral resources for shaping future metropolitan development.

Another relevant study by K. Pulles *et al.* (2023) examined regeneration strategies for historical urban areas across 45 cities, aiming to identify development drivers. Their findings align with the present research in recognising the preservation of historical heritage as a facilitating factor for sustainable urban development. K. Pulles *et al.* (2023) argued that maintaining historic districts can contribute to the creation of cultural, economic, and environmental hubs within the city, attract tourism, or enable functional transformations, while emphasising the importance of local identity and community participation in decision-making to ensure effective and forward-looking urban development. The distinction lies in the approach: K. Pulles *et al.* (2023) focused on contemporary regeneration projects, employing quantitative case study analysis, project management aspects, and business-oriented functional conversions. In contrast, the present study on Bishkek adopted a theoretical and historical analysis of past urban development.

The study by R. Privitera & G. Jelo (2025) on the historical centre of Catania, Italy, examined the conflicts and synergies between the preservation of historic buildings and the adaptation of the city to climate change, which aligns with one of the methodological approaches adopted in the present research. R. Privitera & G. Jelo (2025) focused on nature-based solutions (NbS) to address urban heat islands, stormwater flooding, and other climate-related challenges specific to Catania. This approach resonates with the present analysis of Bishkek, in recognising climate and environmental factors as significant considerations in the urban planning of historic cities, alongside an interdisciplinary analytical perspective. The Catania study was distinguished by its specificity and methodological sophistication, including a clear algorithm, the use of GIS data, and land typology. R. Privitera & G. Jelo (2025) emphasised the creation of green and blue spaces as tools for climate adaptation, analysing at the scale of neighbourhoods and individual

buildings, whereas the Bishkek study considered the city and metropolitan agglomeration scale.

The study by G. Marzani *et al.* (2025) addressed seismic risk in historically built-up areas, effectively proposing a roadmap for authorities to enhance the safety of heritage zones. The consideration of seismicity aligns with the present research, recognising it as a natural factor affecting the preservation of cultural heritage and ensuring physical safety. The study also converged with the present work in emphasising collective identity and urban safety. A distinguishing feature of G. Marzani *et al.* (2025) was its applied approach, offering practical solutions for similar challenges in comparable regions, although it is strongly grounded in the European context, referencing EU projects and regulations.

The study by Y. Wang *et al.* (2025) presents a method of “historical layered analysis” of historic districts, inspired by UNESCO’s Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) concept. The research was conducted on the city of Shenyang, a major historic city and former imperial capital in north-eastern China. The authors integrated approaches from urban morphology, architectural typology, city image, and the “cultural catalyst” theory to investigate development patterns of historic quarters. To achieve the objective of decoding the dynamics of the historical landscape, GIS-based kernel density analysis was employed for quantitative visualisation, identifying areas of “heritage intensification” and “heritage weakening” through the densest concentrations of historical assets. Additionally, geometric modelling was used to provide an abstract representation of spatial transformations, visually illustrating changes in the structure of the quarters. This methodology offered insights for future urban planning, particularly in understanding the distribution and transformation of historic assets within evolving urban contexts. The outcome of the study provided a clearer understanding of Shenyang’s developmental trajectory, showing how its historic core expanded, which elements proved most resilient, and where significant shifts in planning paradigms occurred. The research aligns with the present study, as both considered the city as an accumulation of historical layers. Y. Wang *et al.* (2025) formalised their analysis of Shenyang through four dimensions: territorial, morphological, material, and value-based. This corresponds with the Bishkek study’s objective of obtaining a comprehensive picture of the city’s evolution to inform predictive urban planning decisions through an interdisciplinary approach. The distinction lies in focus and methodology: Y. Wang *et al.* (2025) emphasised the balance between urban development and natural factors, applying a high degree of formalisation and technological tools. By contrast, the Bishkek analysis did not incorporate the dynamic perception of individual historical assets by the local population.

The study by P.Y. Mu *et al.* (2024) focused on the digital reconstruction of urban evolution through historical maps, examining the historic-urban analysis of Suzhou,

China. Similar to the Bishkek study, this research relied on historical cartographic data integrated with contemporary datasets to assess continuity and changes over time. The parallel lies in the comparison of past and present urban layouts, recognising historical maps as valuable tools for understanding urban evolution, while also considering the role of authorities in contemporary planning. Differences emerge in the application of modern GIS technologies and 3D modelling based on ancient maps, whereas the Bishkek study utilised cartographic data only from the 19th century. Moreover, P.Y. Mu *et al.* (2024) demonstrated a high degree of integration between historical analysis, geoinformatics, and architectural design, while the Bishkek study remains a purely historical-urban analysis. Nonetheless, their approach provides a foundation for developing a historical-urban plan of Bishkek incorporating natural elements on a digital platform, facilitating public engagement, creating 3D models of the old city for testing new developments, virtual tourism, and other applications.

T.M. Ferreira & R. Eudave (2022) examined historic urban centres through the lens of natural and anthropogenic hazards, aligning with the Bishkek study in recognising the importance of considering historic cities within the context of contemporary challenges. Both studies emphasised the role of natural and anthropogenic factors in sustainable urban development, the application of specialised vulnerability assessment methodologies, and management plans tailored to the unique character of historic centres, highlighting the complexity of issues including material assets, population, economy, and safety. The distinction lies in scale and scope: T.M. Ferreira & R. Eudave (2022) provided a global scientific review, encompassing concepts, literature, and methodologies addressing mass tourism, military threats, emergencies, socio-economic trends, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, laser scanning, and digital modelling for future heritage risk management. In contrast, the Bishkek study was presented from the perspective of architects and urban planners, focusing on the historical-urban analysis of a specific city rather than a global review.

The study by F. Wu *et al.* (2024), focusing on the impact of railways on the development of Bishkek, resonates with the findings of the present article, as both works highlight key stages in the city’s spatial growth. Both studies emphasised the role of transport infrastructure in shaping urban layout and economic development. F. Wu *et al.* (2024) analysed how the railway stimulated the growth of new zones and altered urban morphology, aligning with the present study’s conclusions regarding the significance of engineering interventions, including the planning of the “Solar Town”. However, unlike F. Wu *et al.* (2024), who concentrated on a single factor, the present research adopts a broader scope, encompassing archaeological evidence as well as natural and seismic conditions. Consequently, both studies complement

each other, illustrating different levels of analysis in understanding urban formation.

The review and analytical study by L. Geng *et al.* (2025) assessed the global scholarly discourse on the conservation of historic urban centres in the early twenty-first century. The growing interest among architects, urban planners, sociologists, and ecologists demonstrated the interdisciplinary nature of such research. The study employed the historic urban landscape (HUL) framework to inform programmes and projects for sustainable urban development, highlighting the economic impact of heritage conservation. It emphasised the necessity of approaches to preserving and studying historic and cultural heritage free from ideological influence, advocating for a holistic view of the city and adaptive governance. All monuments should be considered as an integrated whole, with public participation in addressing urban challenges. While L. Geng *et al.* (2025) illustrated a study of global scale, the Bishkek research was local in scope, despite similarities in conceptual approach and terminology.

In summary, the comparative analysis indicated that the study of Bishkek underscores the relevance of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to examining and planning historic urban development. Despite differences in methodologies, scales, and research tools, the reviewed cases consistently highlight the importance of considering the historical and cultural context, as well as natural and climatic factors, alongside public participation in processes of spatial transformation. For Bishkek, this implies the necessity of integrating the city's historical layers – such as medieval settlements, the Kokand fortress, elements of Soviet urbanism, and green infrastructure – into contemporary approaches to master planning. It is through the combination of scholarly heritage, digital technologies, and sustainable design strategies that a city can be shaped to preserve its identity while adapting to contemporary challenges.

■ Conclusions

The conducted historical-urban analysis successfully achieved its objectives: the key stages in the development of the capital city of the Kyrgyz Republic were systematically synthesised – from ancient settlements and medieval “tortkuls” to the formation of Pishpek-Frunze-Bishkek under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union – and the principles for rational and anticipatory development of the contemporary city were substantiated. As a result of a comprehensive examination of archaeological materials from the Institute of Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic,

nineteenth-century military topographic surveys, and master plans from different periods, a refined historical-spatial profile of Bishkek was established.

The analysis revealed the continuity of the street grid in the central part of the city, originally established in the 1878 master plan, and confirmed the role of natural and landscape factors – including the tributaries of the Ala-Archa and Alamedin rivers, five geomorphological belts, and the seismicity of the Chui Basin – in shaping the green infrastructure and irrigation corridors. The examination of the evolution of historical-urban planning decisions demonstrated how changes in political and administrative status – from the Kokand fortress of Pishpek to the capital status of Frunze and the independent city of Bishkek – affected the scale and character of development, urban-forming axes, and the system of public spaces. A systematic interdisciplinary approach enabled the integration of quantitative methods (street profile morphometrics, comparative plan scales) with qualitative sources (travel notes, archival descriptions), providing a deeper understanding of historical and cultural values and their influence on the contemporary urban fabric. Key heritage ‘nodes’ were identified – including medieval settlements, the Kokand fortress, the “Solar Town”, and Soviet-era monuments – whose integration into contemporary master plans could support the preservation of the city's identity and ecological sustainability.

Prospects for further research include a detailed urban planning assessment of the peripheral territories incorporated into Bishkek following the December 2023 decree, and the development of methodologies for adapting green irrigation corridors within new neighbourhoods. It is considered important to conduct sociological surveys on residents' perceptions of historical and cultural heritage, alongside digital modelling of spatial development scenarios that account for climate risks and transport loads. Additionally, the development of a “historic-architectural route” through the city centre is recommended, linking archaeological, cultural-historical, and natural sites, which would enhance both the tourism and educational potential of Bishkek.

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Бишкек шаарын түзүү жана өнүктүрүү боюнча шаар курулуштук тарыхый анализ

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Аннотация. Кыргыз Республикасынын Президентинин 2023-жылдын 29-декабрындагы Бишкек шаарынын административдик-аймактык чек араларын кеңейтүү жөнүндөгү Жарлыгына байланыштуу, Москва, Нью-Дели, ошондой эле «Чоң Лондон» жана башка мегаполистердин үлгүсүндө, аймактык кеңейтүү көптөгөн шаар куруу көйгөйлөрүнүн жаралышына жана мурдагы көйгөйлөрдүн күчөшүнө алып келет, бул калктын жашоосуна тиешелүү маанилүү кызыкчылыктарга таасирин тийгизет. Шаар аймагынын кеңейиши менен шаардын тарыхый-опордук планы боюнча, жаңы тарыхый-маданий, ландшафттык-жаратылыштык жана башка маанидеги эстеликтерди кошуу боюнча көптөгөн маселелер жаралышы мүмкүн. Изилдөөнүн максаты Кыргызстандын борборун рационалдуу, экономикалык жактан натыйжалуу жана келечекке багытталган өнүктүрүү үчүн теориялык негиздерди аныктоо болгон. Иштин жүрүшүндө тарыхый-хронологиялык жана тарыхый-шарташтык анализ (1878-2025-жылдарга чейинки башкы пландарды салыштыруу), системалуу междисциплинардык мамиле (табиат-климаттык жана сейсмикалык факторлорду эске алуу), салыштырма-тарыхый метод жана баштапкы булактарды сынчыл талдоо колдонулган. Изилдөө көрсөткөндөй, 1878-жылдагы Пишпектин түз төрт бурчтук көчөлөр тору азыркы Бишкектин туруктуу каркасын түзгөн. Советтик жана постсоветтик мезгилдердеги пландаштыруу түзүмүнүн трансформация баскычтары талданган; табигый-географиялык шарттардын (рельеф, дарыялар, сейсмикалык коркунуч) шаар формалаштыруу процессине таасири каралган. Мурдагы «бакча-шаар» долбоорлору (1920-1930-жылдардагы радиалдык-шакекче пландар) жашыл инфраструктура жана аба алмашуу (желдетүү) үчүн баалуулугун сактап келет. Башкы планды актуалдаштырууда тарыхый жана маданий мурастардын баалуулуктарын интеграциялоо зарылдыгы тастыкталган. Изилдөөнүн жыйынтыктары Бишкек шаарынын шаар куруу пландоо жана башкаруу органдары тарабынан Башкы планды түзүү жана актуалдаштырууда, ошондой эле илимий жана билим берүү мекемелери тарабынан борбордун туруктуу өнүгүү стратегияларын калыптандырууда колдонулушу мүмкүн.

Негизги сөздөр: Кокон бекети; Пишпек бекети; шаар планы; генеральдык план; архитектуралык-пландоо түзүлүшү; территориялык өнүгүү

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Аннотация. В связи с Указом Президента Кыргызской Республики от 29 декабря 2023 года о расширении административно-территориальных границ города Бишкек, по аналогии с городом Москвой, Нью-Дели, а также «Большим Лондоном» и другими мегаполисами, территориальное расширение приводит к возникновению множества градостроительных проблем и усугублению уже существующих, затрагивающих жизненно важные интересы населения. С расширением городского ареала могут возникать множество вопросов по историко-опорному плану города с включением новых памятников историко-культурного, ландшафтно-природного и других значений. Цель исследования заключалась в определении теоретических основ для рационального, экономически эффективного и прогнозного развития столицы Кыргызстана. В работе применены историко-хронологический и историко-градостроительный анализы (сравнение генеральных планов с 1878 по 2025 год), системный междисциплинарный подход (учёт природно-климатических и сейсмических факторов), сравнительно-исторический метод и критический анализ первоисточников. Было выявлено, что регулярная прямоугольная сетка улиц Пишпека 1878 года сформировала устойчивый каркас современного Бишкека. Проведён анализ этапов трансформации планировочной структуры в советский и постсоветский периоды; рассмотрено влияние природно-географических условий (рельеф, реки, сейсмическая опасность) на градоформирование. Установлено, что прежние проекты «города-сада» (радиально-кольцевые планы 1920-1930 годов) сохраняют ценность для зелёной инфраструктуры и проветриваемости. Подтверждена необходимость интеграции ценностей исторического и культурного наследия при актуализации Генерального плана. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы органами градостроительного планирования и управления Бишкеком при разработке и актуализации Генерального плана, а также научными и образовательными учреждениями при формировании стратегий устойчивого развития столицы

Негизги сөздөр: Кокон бекети; Пишпек бекети; шаар планы; генеральдык план; архитектуралык-пландоо түзүлүшү; территориялык өнүгүү