

Everyday Life Of Nukus Citizens In The 1960s: A Socio-Historical Aspect

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Abstract: This article talks about the formation of the city of Nukus as the administrative and political center of Karakalpakstan in 1960. The development of urban infrastructure and the growth of the living standards of the urban population required the intensification of work in all spheres of life and life of society. In the 1960s, Nukus became the center of enlightenment and science. It is noted that the subject of everyday life in the scientific plan will help to recreate the contexts and condition for the formation of the urban environment and urban everyday life in Karakalpakstan.

Keywords: Urbanization, modernization, town infrastructure, improvement of the city, living standard, sphere of the culture, social development, everyday life.

Introduction: The formation of Nukus as the administrative and political center of Karakalpakstan in the 1960s testifies to the rapid pace of urbanization and modernization of the social and everyday aspects of public life. If in the pre-war years, when the city was only beginning to be built, about 10,000 people lived in Nukus, by 1959 this figure had already reached 39,000 [1]. At the same time, the city continued to grow both administratively and socio-economically.

The development of urban infrastructure in the early 1960s was greatly influenced by the commissioning of the Takhiatash Thermal Power Plant, which was launched on May 24, 1961, and supplied electricity to many urban centers of our republic and the neighboring regions of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, such as Khorezm and Tashauz. First and foremost, electricity was provided to the industrial enterprises of Nukus and the city's network. At that time, Nukus already had the Nukus repair-mechanical and auto-repair plants, a house-building plant, sewing and

knitwear factories, as well as several food industry enterprises: the Nukus bread-baking plant, oil plant, brewery, flour mill, meat processing plant, the Nukus printing plant, and others. With the commissioning of the Takhiatash Thermal Power Plant, the network of transport and communications also began to develop. Metalworking enterprises, as well as enterprises of the construction and woodworking industries, grew in number.

Great attention was also paid to the social and everyday side of citizens' lives: particular importance was given to providing residents with drinking water, and the asphaltting of city streets began. At first, asphalt was laid on the central streets of the city—Leningradskaya (Sayakhathshilar) and Kuibyshev (Gh. Aresizlik), and in 1961 on Pushkin, Kirov (G. Sheraziyeu), Chekhov (S. Akhmedov), and other nearby central streets. Urban improvement progressed at an accelerated pace, which was even recognized with the second prize in the competition among cities of

Uzbekistan, organized by the Council of Ministers of Uzbekistan and Uzsovprom. Following the results of 1960 and the first quarter of 1961, the Nukus City Executive Committee consistently received the second prize in the amount of 1,000 rubles for the good organization of improvement works.

In May 1961, at a meeting of the city's Soviet-party and trade union activists, monetary awards were given for active participation in improvement works to the collectives of the motor depot of the UzSSR Council of National Economy, the Berdakh school, and the Statistical Administration of the Karakalpak ASSR. The work of the collectives of Pushkin and Gogol schools, the bread-baking plant, the medical school, and the editorial boards of the republican newspapers was also acknowledged [2].

During this period, Nukus consisted of 31 neighborhood committees, among which the City Executive Committee actively promoted campaigns for the improvement of the city. Enterprises and educational institutions carried out active propaganda encouraging participation in this work. In principle, the everyday practice of Karakalpak society already had traditional roots of Soviet-style "subbotniks" and "voskresniks" (voluntary community labor on Saturdays and Sundays), known locally as *asar*, *komek*, and *khashar*. Traditionally, villagers collectively and voluntarily participated in the construction of socially significant buildings (such as schools), helped in building houses, harvesting crops, and similar tasks. However, in the 1960s, the Soviet authorities reinterpreted this tradition, making city improvement and greening—especially in Nukus—the primary direction of such work.

The population of Nukus consisted mainly of people who had moved from rural areas, bringing their culture into the urban environment. At the same time, subbotniks and voskresniks were organized by local authorities under the overall supervision of party bodies. As a result, about 7,000 people participated in community labor in Nukus every week. It was precisely in these years that the "tradition" of involving students in city improvement and cleaning began. Thus, in the 1960s, students of the Nukus Pedagogical Institute and the medical school, along with other secondary specialized and general education institutions, took part in subbotniks and voskresniks every week, organized into groups. Students of the Pedagogical Institute planted a ten-meter-wide protective forest belt around the airport, groups from the medical school worked in the "Victory" Park, while every street was cleaned of garbage. Irrigation ditches (*aryks*) were dug to water citizens' garden plots. According to eyewitnesses, the city was immersed in greenery at

that time, with fruit trees growing everywhere. An irrigation system operated through flowing ditches, which originated from the main Kyzketken Canal (now Doslik). The city's population used water from these intra-urban canals for irrigation, daily needs, and even for food preparation.

At the end of the 1950s, to provide the population with drinking water, water columns were first installed on central streets, and later on every street. For example, several hundred meters south of the central city square, there was a residential area of more than one hundred adobe houses. In the 1950s–1960s, residents fetched drinking water from columns located near the two-story houses on Amir Timur Street (formerly M. Gorky Street). These apartment buildings housed government officials and representatives of the intelligentsia. According to eyewitnesses, there were no fences between the houses, although they were arranged along the street. Therefore, residents would carry water in buckets on a shoulder yoke (*iynaghash*—literally, *iyn* meaning "shoulder," and *agash* meaning "pole") directly across several hundred meters between the yards. For household needs, people continued to use water from the intra-urban canals.

The development of urban infrastructure and the rising standard of living of the urban population required intensified efforts in all spheres of social and everyday life. Technical devices such as bicycles and sewing machines, not to mention refrigerators, washing machines, and motorcycles—though still a rarity in households—were gradually being introduced into the daily lives of city dwellers. Most residents continued to use kerosene stoves and primus burners, which created a high demand for specialists in repairing primus stoves, kerosene burners, shoes, hat-making, and bicycle repair workshops. The majority of residents turned to the small private "booths" that existed at the time. Their owners were prosecuted by law enforcement agencies, but not too harshly, since there were no alternatives: the city's industrial complex, which officially dealt with public services for the population of Nukus, could not meet the needs and demands of the people [3].

On January 1, 1961, new banknotes and coins were introduced into circulation, exchanged at a rate of 1 to 10. The population gradually became accustomed to the new currency: prices in stores were indicated in both old and new money. When buying goods, old rubles were accepted, but change was returned in new notes, sometimes in coins. There were even awkward situations at first—for example, when people insisted on receiving change in old currency, as it felt unusual to take 50 kopecks in coins instead of the old 5 rubles. At that time, several retail enterprises were opened on

the ground floors of residential buildings in Nukus: Department Store No. 1, Grocery Store No. 19, a meat-and-dairy shop, a sporting goods store, a bookstore, and the “Children’s World” shop [4].

The cultural and leisure sphere of city residents included several open-air venues—summer cinemas—as well as two indoor cinemas (“Vostok” in the old part of the city and “Rodina,” located a few dozen meters from the central square in the new part of Nukus), the Karakalpak Stanislavsky Theater, the local history museum, and the republican library. In the open-air venues, 3–4 days a week, there were sometimes public lectures and concert programs, though most often films were shown on a large screen. Judging by the posters of those years, the films shown were predominantly in Russian.

The local language was heard in the productions of the Stanislavsky Theater (now the Berdakh Theater), while Karakalpak dramaturgy was only beginning to develop, even though theatrical traditions in Karakalpakstan had deep roots. The theater’s creative troupe made its contribution to the cultural service of the population: new productions were staged annually (mostly works by Soviet authors and foreign classics), but works by local playwrights were also included. For example, in 1960, the theater’s repertoire for the new season featured plays by S. Khojamuratov (Taluas), M. Kalimbetov (My Authority), and P. Tlegenov (Gures) [5].

In the 1960s, Nukus truly became a center of education and science. The city was home to the Republican Library as well as dozens of preschool and general education institutions. For example, in 1958, 600 children were enrolled in 10 kindergartens. In 1961, a new kindergarten for 100 children was opened on Kuibyshev Street (now Gharezsizlyk Street). In 1950, the city had 12 general education schools, but as the city expanded, the demand for highly qualified teachers became increasingly acute. For instance, while in the 1958–1959 academic year, 80,078 children studied in 622 schools of Karakalpakstan, by September 1, 1962, the number of schools had grown to 648 (300 primary schools, 247 eight-year schools, 89 secondary schools, and 7 boarding schools) with 112,951 students [6].

Teaching staff were mainly trained at the Nukus State Pedagogical Institute. The Karakalpak government paid special attention to the institute, helping strengthen its material base and improve its ties with other leading higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. The director of the institute, T. Bekimbetov, enjoyed great authority and work experience. He possessed qualities that played an important role in the region’s history, such as the ability to identify talented students from among gifted youth. This was the case with

academician M.K. Nurmukhamedov, whom Bekimbetov recognized as early as 1950. The future scholar passed state exams externally at the Khodjeyli Pedagogical College, received his secondary school diploma, and immediately took the state exams at the Karakalpak State Pedagogical Institute. He was then admitted to postgraduate studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences in Moscow. After defending his Candidate of Sciences dissertation in 1953, M.K. Nurmukhamedov worked as Deputy Director of the Comprehensive Research Institute, later became Chairman of the Presidium of the Karakalpak Branch of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, defended his Doctor of Sciences dissertation, and was elected an academician of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan [7].

Bekimbetov assembled a highly qualified faculty, which by 1960 had significantly raised the level and scope of knowledge and the quality of graduates. Among the staff were well-known innovative teachers who later became honored figures of science and technology of Karakalpakstan and merited teachers of Uzbekistan—Associate Professors T. Bekimbetov, K. Ubaydullaev, A. Yesemuratov, A. Kdyrbaev; Professors Zh. Orynbaev, K. Berdimuratov, A. Tajimuratov, N. Daukaraev, D. Nasyrov, Ya. Dosumov, and many others. In a short time, the Pedagogical Institute trained a group of specialists who distinguished themselves not only in teaching but also in science, culture, and the arts of the republic. By the 1960s, general education institutions in the republic employed 6,942 teachers (including 1,471 women), 2,494 of whom had higher education [8]. Later, many of them were recognized by the state for their devoted service: in the 1970s, schools in the republic employed 30 honored teachers of the Karakalpak ASSR, 126 recipients of the “Excellence in Public Education” award, and more than 500 order-bearers.

Another branch of the education system was vocational and technical education. In the 1940s–1950s, a system of vocational-technical schools was established in the republic to train skilled workers for all branches of industry and transport. From October 1958, craft, railway, construction, mining, and industrial schools, as well as FZO schools and agricultural mechanization colleges, were reorganized into urban and rural vocational-technical schools. For example, in 1951, in the suburb of Nukus, in the village of Kyzketken, a school for excavator operators was opened. This was the only educational institution in Uzbekistan that trained excavator operators and machine drivers for work in Karakalpakstan and Khorezm. In its first year, 120 students studied there, and in 1953 the school held

two graduations: one in May and the second at the end of the year. Each year, the school sent more than 150 excavator operators and diesel mechanics to various districts of Karakalpakia and Khorezm. In 1953, the school was transformed into an Agricultural Mechanization College, continuing to fulfill the important task of preparing workers for the national economy. Later, the Kyzketken Agricultural Mechanization College was reorganized into Rural Vocational-Technical School No. 27.

Subsequently, a number of vocational and technical educational institutions were opened. Among them were Technical School No. 61, which trained workers in trade and public services; Nukus City Secondary Vocational-Technical School No. 39, which prepared construction specialists; and in 1973, SVTU-56 was opened. With the development of railway transport in the region, the Karakalpak branch of the Central Asian Railway faced the task of training personnel for the railway. Beginning in 1978, these needs were met by the opening of GVPTU-15 in Nukus.

In the city's infrastructure, the healthcare system played an important role. Back in late 1942, the apparatus of the People's Commissariat of Health of the republic, headed by Commissar Ye. Zhkov, was relocated to Nukus. During the war years, the city's fragile healthcare system experienced great difficulties. Most medical workers went to the front, and there was a shortage of fuel and medicines. Only in the postwar years could the city's budget afford to allocate larger funds for the development of healthcare: in 1948, 4,184,000 rubles were allocated, and in 1951—4,894,000 rubles. Physicians returned from the frontlines and resumed peaceful work. Among them, war participant Dr. Seraly Bekzhanov was appointed head of the Nukus City Health Department, and Reypnazar Babanazarov became the city's state sanitary inspector.

The acute shortage of personnel forced the authorities to hastily organize the training of mid-level medical staff for the city's healthcare facilities, as well as for the northern and western districts of the republic. In this respect, conditions in Nukus were somewhat more favorable: if in the 1950s there were 50 doctors in the city, by 1958 there were already 80 doctors and 250 mid-level medical workers. The central pharmacy was functioning, but there was still a shortage of pharmacists, pharmaceutical specialists, professionally trained nurses, and orderlies in medical institutions. Therefore, in 1955, the Nukus Medical School created pharmacy groups and an evening department for training nurses.

In 1956, the Republican Hospital was opened in Nukus,

but at the same time the city hospital was abolished. Thus, for several subsequent years, the Republican Hospital—with its therapeutic, surgical, maternity, gynecological, pediatric, and infectious disease departments—also fulfilled the role of the city hospital. In 1961, children's and infectious disease hospitals were opened in Nukus, along with a maternity hospital that included a gynecology department and a women's consultation clinic. As a result, from 1959 to 1971 morbidity rates in the republic decreased sixfold, and mortality rates fourfold [9]. However, according to average statistical indicators, the incidence of diseases such as tuberculosis in Karakalpakstan remained 30% higher [10].

The republic experienced a severe shortage of doctors—radiologists, phthisiatricians, pediatricians, and others. For example, Polyclinic No. 1 in Nukus served an area of 22,000 people, but due to the absence of a radiologist, not a single chest X-ray was performed in 1971, even though more than 180 people visited the clinic daily. Across the entire republic there were only 50 X-ray machines, of which 60% were low-powered and lacked tomographic capability. In fact, only 28 machines were in working condition. Meanwhile, in the republic, one bed in a tuberculosis treatment facility had to serve 7.6 patients [11]. By the late 1960s—early 1970s, there were only 89 phthisiatricians in Karakalpakstan. Pediatricians were also in short supply: in Nukus itself, there were only 23.

Overall, the 1960s in the history of Nukus represent a key period for understanding not only social development but also the everyday life of its citizens. The measures undertaken to improve the social sphere produced certain results and influenced daily life. However, they were clearly insufficient: in terms of living standards and social security, Karakalpakstan ranked among the lowest even within Uzbekistan.

In revealing the true state of everyday practices of Nukus residents, this study has primarily relied on archival materials and periodical publications. Posters, paintings, photographs, as well as other official and unofficial documents (memoirs, recollections, letters, etc.) are also of great significance. We believe that the subject of everyday life brings us closer to a deeper perception of the concept of Homeland and, from a scholarly perspective, contributes to reconstructing the contexts and conditions in which the urban environment and urban everyday life in Karakalpakstan were formed.

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