

UDC 94:[621.331-043.2:911.375.1(477.72-25)]

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32999/ksu2786-5118/2026-53-5>

URBAN TRANSFORMATION OF KHERSON AT THE TURN OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES: ELECTRIC TRANSPORT AS A MECHANISM OF URBAN MODERNIZATION

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The purpose of this article is to analyze the processes of organization, evolution, and development of Kherson's urban space at the beginning of the 20th century in the context of modernization processes in southern Ukraine, in particular through the attempt to introduce electric trams under an agreement with Italian citizen V.F. Bosalini. The article compares Kherson with its neighboring cities, Odesa and Mykolaiv, where tramways were implemented, which allows us to assess the peculiarities of local urban transformation. **Methodologically, the study** is based on a comprehensive historical and urban analysis using a cybernetic approach to urban space management and the theory of urban system modernization. It uses an analysis of archival sources, in particular a comparative analysis of the experience of other southern cities in the field of tramway implementation and technological modernization. The scientific novelty of the article lies in the comprehensive combination of two theoretical concepts: cybernetically oriented urban space management and the theory of modernization with a European orientation. Another scientific novelty is that we introduce new archival documents into scientific circulation. **The main content** of the article shows that the agreement with Bosalini contained a potential management system integrating transport, energy, and social infrastructure that corresponded to the principles of feedback, hierarchy, and adaptability. However, the project remained unrealized, which fundamentally distinguishes the modernization of Kherson and Mykolaiv from Odesa, where tramways contributed to the formation of integrated cybernetic systems of urban management and socio-economic dynamics. The article also highlights the role of foreign entrepreneurs as agents of European modernization who could have introduced advanced European technical standards, organizational models, and urban practices in Kherson. **The conclusions** emphasize that the lack of practical implementation of the project limited Kherson's modernization potential, leaving its urban space in a state of potential but incomplete transformation.

Keywords: Kherson, tramization, urban space modernization, Europeanization, urbanism, Southern Ukraine.

МІСЬКА ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ ХЕРСОНА НА РУБЕЖІ ХІХ–ХХ СТ: ЕЛЕКТРОТРАНСПОРТ ЯК МЕХАНІЗМ УРБАНІСТИЧНОЇ МОДЕРНІЗАЦІЇ

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Метою статті є аналіз процесів організації, еволюції та розвитку міського простору Херсона на початку ХХ в контексті модернізаційних процесів Півдня України, зокрема через спробу впровадження електричного трамвая за договором з італійським підданим В.І. Босаліні. Стаття розглядає Херсон у порівнянні з містами-сусідами, Одесою та Миколаєвом, де трамвайзація була реалізована, що дозволяє оцінити особливості локальної урбаністичної трансформації. **Методологічно дослідження** ґрунтується на комплексному історико-урбаністичному аналізі з застосуванням теорії модернізації. Використано аналіз архівних джерел, зокрема порівняльний аналіз досвіду інших південних міст у сфері трамвайзації та технологічної модернізації. Наукова новизна статті полягає у залученні теорії модернізації з європейською орієнтацією. А також науковою новизною є те, що ми вводим до наукового обігу нові архівні документи. **Основний зміст статті** показує, що договір з В. Босаліні містив потенційну систему управління, інтегруючи транспортну, енергетичну та соціальну інфраструктури, яка відповідала принципам зворотного зв'язку, ієрархії та адаптивності. Проте проєкт залишився нереалізованим, що кардинально відрізняє модернізацію Херсона і Миколаєва з Одесою, де трамвайзація сприяла формуванню інтегрованих систем міського управління та соціально-економічної динаміки. Також у статті висвітлено роль іноземного підприємця як агента європейської модернізації, який міг би впровадити у Херсоні передові європейські технічні стандарти, організаційні моделі та урбаністичні практики. **Висновки** підкреслюють,

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що відсутність практичної реалізації проєкту обмежила модернізаційний потенціал Херсона, залишивши його міський простір у стані потенційної, але незавершеної трансформації.

Ключові слова: Херсон, трамвайзація, модернізація міського простору, європеїзація, урбаністика, Південь України.

1. Introduction

The relevance of this research, in our view, lies in the fact that the study of the urban transformation of Kherson at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is important for understanding the processes of modernization in the cities of Southern Ukraine. Unlike the neighboring cities of Odesa and Mykolaiv, Kherson did not undergo a completed process of tramway development. This circumstance makes it possible to assess the specific features of local urban dynamics, the socio-economic consequences of unrealized infrastructure projects, and the potential of urban space during a period of accelerated modernization. The use of the contract between the Kherson City Administration and the Italian subject V. Bosalini provides a unique opportunity to analyze the urban and modernization concepts of the studied period through the prism of a single historical source. This document makes it possible to reconstruct the mechanisms of urban infrastructure planning, the interaction of administrative, technical, and social components, and to demonstrate the potential influence of European practices on the development of Kherson. The significance of this research is further reinforced by the fact that the source originates from the holdings of the State Archive of the Kherson Region, which was looted by Russian forces during the temporary occupation of the city in 2022. Work with this document simultaneously represents the process of introducing its contents into scholarly circulation and preserving important historical material for future research. We believe that the actualization of this source contributes to the expansion of the archival and historical corpus and creates opportunities for comparative analysis of urban development in Southern Ukraine at the beginning of the twentieth century, strengthening scholarly understanding of the local characteristics of modernization processes in the region.

The historiography of research on the urban space of Kherson and the southern region of Ukraine during the studied period makes it possible to outline the scholarly tradition and determine the place of our research within contemporary Ukrainian historiography. Within the context of recent studies on urbanism and municipal self-government in Southern Ukraine, two conditional groups of scholarly approaches can be distinguished: historical analytical studies and archaeological studies directly related to the restoration and introduction into scholarly circulation of documentary heritage.

Among contemporary historical studies are the works of such scholars as V. Konstantinova, A. Dorosheva, O. Cheremisin, and H. Mykhailenko. These researchers focus on the comprehensive analysis of

the urban space of southern Ukrainian cities, addressing issues of infrastructure development, socio-economic organization, and modernization processes. In particular, V. Konstantinova (Konstantinova, 2010) pays attention to the development of urban space and its influence on the socio-economic dynamics of cities, while A. Dorosheva (Dorosheva, 2009) analyzes administrative and legislative mechanisms of urban governance within a regional context. In our opinion, their works provide an important methodological and analytical basis for evaluating urban processes; however, they do not always focus on specific archival documents, which limits the possibility of reconstructing local management practices and specific modernization projects such as electrification, telephony, and others.

Particular attention in historiography should be paid to the works of O. Cheremisin and H. Mykhailenko (Mykhailenko, G., Cheremisin, 2022: 46–55), whose studies combine both historical analysis and archaeological work. The historical dimension of their research is represented, in particular, in the monograph «Municipal Self-Government in Southern Ukraine in 1785-1917», in which O. Cheremisin (Cheremisin, 2017) provides an in-depth analytical overview of the development of administrative and urban institutions in the region. He examines the dynamics of the formation of municipal governance, the interaction between local authorities and entrepreneurs, and the socio-economic consequences of infrastructure projects. Professor O. Cheremisin formulates his own methodological approaches to the evaluation of urban development, emphasizing the complexity of the interaction between technical, administrative, and social components of the urban environment. Importantly, his research allows comparison of real modernization processes in different southern cities and the identification of local characteristics that were significant for Kherson and its unfinished electric transport system.

The archaeological aspect of the work of O. Cheremisin and H. Mykhailenko is associated with the publication of sources from the State Archive of the Kherson Region (Cheremisin O., Mykhailenko H., 2025: 45-59). In these works, the researchers systematize and introduce into scholarly circulation materials that were previously inaccessible or preserved only in local archives. Of particular value are studies related to the preservation of cultural memory and the restoration of the historical corpus of sources, some of which were stolen by Russian occupying forces in 2022. Thanks to these publications, the scholarly community gains access to documents that make it possible to reconstruct local urban processes, evaluate the potential of modernization

projects, and analyze their socio-economic context. Importantly, the researchers combine analytical work with archaeography, creating opportunities for simultaneous historical interpretation and introduction of sources into scholarly circulation, which is directly relevant to the study of attempts to introduce electric transport in Kherson under the contract with V. Bosalini at the turn of the century.

Despite the quite representative body of previous research, historiography still contains little-known gaps to which this study is addressed. Contemporary works generally focus on traditional theoretical and methodological approaches within historical scholarship. They are limited to a general assessment of infrastructural changes and do not concentrate on specific local modernization projects that ultimately remained unrealized. In the case of Kherson, this concerns the attempt to introduce electric transport under the contract with V. Bosalini, which remained at the level of planning and formal agreements. Therefore, the study of local unrealized projects makes it possible to evaluate the potential of urban space and the dynamics of managerial decision-making in the context of accelerated modernization, an issue that remains insufficiently explored in contemporary historiography. Furthermore, there is a gap in the study of interconnected European modernization practices and local urban projects in Southern Ukraine. Although the works of O. Cheremisin and H. Mykhailenko cover both historical and archaeographic aspects, a detailed analysis of the influence of European technologies and entrepreneurial initiatives on the planning and development of urban transport in Kherson remains limited. The very fact that the project of V. Bosalini envisaged the integration of European electric transport standards demonstrates the need to study the mechanisms of Europeanization of local infrastructure, its regulatory framework, and its socio-economic consequences. At the same time, the role of archival sources, particularly those affected during the temporary occupation of Kherson in 2022, remains insufficiently highlighted in scholarly discourse. The study of the Bosalini contract (State Archive of the Kherson Region, F. 4, Op. 1, File 15), which has not previously been systematized or introduced into scholarly circulation, makes it possible to fill this gap while simultaneously demonstrating the importance of archaeographic work for the restoration of historical memory and ensuring access for the analysis of urban processes in the region, particularly in comparison with neighboring cities.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyze the processes of organization, evolution, and development of the urban space of Kherson at the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of modernization processes in Southern Ukraine, particularly through the attempt to introduce an electric tramway under a contract with the Italian subject V. Bosalini.

To achieve this goal, our research proposes a theoretical and methodological concept of the modernization theory of urban space oriented toward European practices, in which the key factor is the influence of foreign entrepreneurs and technical innovations that introduced elements of Europeanization into the city. In the case of Kherson, a particularly important role was played by the Italian subject V. Bosalini, whose contract envisaged the creation of an electric tramway network according to contemporary European standards. This reflects the aspiration of the local administration to integrate the city into a broader European context of technical and urban modernization, using foreign experience as a model for the transformation of urban space.

The theory of urban modernization is based on the principles of technological borrowing and cultural adaptation: the introduction of new engineering solutions, transport systems, architectural standards, and organizational models of governance that enable a city to increase the efficiency of its functioning and approach European norms. The project of V. Bosalini demonstrates a classical example of such an approach planning an electric tramway together with all related infrastructural elements. The organization of traffic, standards for tramcars and pavilions, and mechanisms of control and safety were intended to create in Kherson a potential European urban space integrated into the modernization principles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Within this system, the entrepreneur acts as an agent of change through whom the city gains access to modern engineering solutions, organizational models, and standards of urban development oriented toward European practice. In Kherson this process remained potential, demonstrating the limitations of modernization when planned projects are not fully implemented and highlighting the importance of implementing innovative practices to achieve genuine Europeanization of urban space.

2. The Contract between V. Bosalini and the Kherson City Duma as a Model of Modernization-Oriented Urban Governance

An analysis of the contract concluded between the Kherson City Duma and the Italian subject V. Bosalini allows this document to be regarded as a conceptual model of modernization-oriented urban governance, in which European technical standards, new forms of administrative interaction, and elements of the regulation of socio-economic processes were combined. Above all, the contract demonstrates the orientation of the Kherson City Duma and municipal administration toward the Europeanization of urban space. The choice of a foreign contractor was not accidental. For the municipal authorities, V. Bosalini represented access to contemporary electric transport technologies, organizational schemes for the operation

of tramway networks, and managerial practices that had already been tested in leading European cities. The text of the contract reveals an intention to integrate Kherson into the broader European urban space by introducing electric transport as a key element of the modern city. In this context, the tramway should be considered from several perspectives: on the one hand, it was an infrastructural object; on the other, it was an instrument for organizing and intensifying population mobility.

The entrepreneur V. Bosalini appears as an agent of technological development and transformation. He was entrusted with the functions of designing, constructing, and commissioning an integral electric tramway system, which included the laying of tracks, the construction of power stations, the supply of rolling stock, the organization of depots and pavilions, as well as the provision of technical maintenance. He was expected not only to ensure the material implementation of the project but also to facilitate the transfer of innovative knowledge and technologies into the urban environment of Kherson. Through this contract, the municipal authorities effectively delegated to a private entrepreneur a significant share of the functions associated with infrastructure modernization, which was a characteristic feature of European models of urban development at the beginning of the twentieth century (State Archive of the Kherson Region, F. 4, Op. 1, File 15: 2–4).

The model of governance embedded in the contract demonstrates a complex hierarchy of interaction between the contractor and the bodies of municipal self-government. The Kherson City Duma and municipal administration retained regulatory and supervisory functions, determining technical parameters, deadlines for the completion of works, operating conditions, passenger tariffs, and traffic safety requirements. V. Bosalini, in turn, was obliged to comply with the established regulations, report on the progress of works, respond to comments from the municipal authorities, and eliminate identified deficiencies. Such a system of governance reflects the principle of hierarchy, whereby strategic decisions remained within the competence of municipal bodies, while the operational implementation of the project was entrusted to a private entrepreneur (State Archive of the Kherson Region, F.4, Op. 1, File 15: 6–8).

An important element of the contract is the set of feedback mechanisms manifested in the prescribed forms of control, inspection, and sanctions. The municipal administration had the right to inspect facilities, demand corrections to design decisions, and impose fines in the event of violations of contractual conditions. The intensity of tram traffic, the technical condition of the infrastructure, and compliance with operating rules became objects of constant monitoring, making it possible to adapt the functioning of the system to the actual conditions of

urban life. The agreement thus established a distinctly dynamic model of governance in which information about the operation of the system's elements could directly influence subsequent administrative decisions.

The text of the contract also indicates that the principle of adaptability was embedded in the governance structure of this innovative technology. It provided for the possibility of adjusting routes, schedules, technical parameters, and even organizational forms of service depending on passenger growth, urban expansion, or changes in the socio-economic environment. The city appears here as an open system capable of responding to external and internal challenges, while the electric tramway is presented as an instrument of such adaptation.

The specific features of the urban governance model implemented by the Kherson City Duma and municipal administration are revealed in their attempt to combine public control with private initiative. The municipal authorities did not limit themselves to the role of a formal client; rather, they sought to create a comprehensive regulatory framework for the functioning of the new mode of transport, regulating not only technical but also social aspects: the rules for tram use, interaction with other forms of transport, and issues of safety and public order (State Archive of the Kherson Region, F. 4, Op. 1, File 15: 9–14).

This indicates the formation in Kherson of a modern managerial paradigm oriented toward a systemic vision of urban space. The contract with V. Bosalini thus emerges as a model of modernization-oriented urban governance in which European technological standards were combined with local administrative practices. Although the project was never implemented, the text of the contract itself reflects an attempt to integrate Kherson into the European urban context, to establish institutional and infrastructural foundations for the qualitative transformation of the urban environment, and to create regulatory mechanisms corresponding to the challenges of the early twentieth century.

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3. The Modernization Potential of Kherson and Its European Orientation through the Electric Tramway Project

Within the framework of analyzing the contract with V. Bosalini, we consider the electric tramway project as a concentrated manifestation of the modernization potential of Kherson at the beginning of the twentieth century, which, in our opinion, reflected the strong orientation of municipal authorities toward European models of urban organization. The involvement of an Italian entrepreneur as a contractor indicates the conscious intention of the Kherson City Duma to integrate the city into the European urban context by adopting managerial practices, operational models, the organization of public space, and electric transport technologies.

In this sense, the Italian entrepreneur acted as an intermediary between Western European technological

achievements and the needs of the local community. The tramway project in Kherson had the potential to transform not only the transport system of the city but also its spatial structure. The planned routes implied the activation of peripheral districts, an increase in land value along tram lines, the formation of new centers of commercial activity, and a transformation in the logic of urban mobility.

In analyzing the modernization potential of Kherson, we refer to the scholarly works of O. Cheremisin, who repeatedly emphasized in his studies the role of municipal self-government as an active agent of socio-economic transformations. In particular, in his article on market transformations and the modernization of land relations in Southern Ukraine, he demonstrates that during the studied period municipal councils actively used the instruments of self-government to redistribute resources, form new economic practices, and stimulate entrepreneurial activity (Cheremisin, 2021: 136–138). We are inclined to believe that the project proposed by V. Bosalini fits precisely into this logic: the electric tramway was envisioned as a mechanism for stimulating the real estate market, transforming land relations, and reorganizing the spatial structure of the city.

Furthermore, in his work on the Duma model of local self-government as a political institution, O. Cheremisin emphasizes the institutional maturity of southern Ukrainian cities, which since the second half of the nineteenth century had been forming their own administrative traditions. In our opinion, this explains why the Kherson City Duma was prepared to undertake complex infrastructure projects involving foreign capital (Cheremisin, 2021: 63–66). The model of cooperation with V. Bosalini demonstrates that municipal self-government possessed sufficient administrative and financial potential to initiate modernization programs, although their practical implementation encountered a number of objective and subjective obstacles.

At the same time, in our view, the failure to implement the electric tramway project became a key factor that limited the modernization potential of Kherson. We tend to believe that the absence of a tramway network led to the preservation of traditional forms of mobility, restrained the development of certain districts, and resulted in a lower level of spatial integration of the city compared to Odesa and Mykolaiv, where tramway systems were successfully implemented. This observation also corresponds with the conclusions of O. Cheremisin regarding the role of financial instruments of municipal self-government, particularly the system of special and additional taxes which, as he demonstrates, played an important role in supporting infrastructure transformations (Cheremisin, 2020: 60–67). We believe that limited financial resources and the difficulty of coordinating

the interests of various local elites may have been among the primary reasons for the failure of the Bosalini project.

As a result, the electric tramway project in Kherson appears, in our view, as a symbol of unrealized European modernization. It reveals the high level of ambition of municipal authorities, their orientation toward Western European models, and their readiness for institutional and spatial transformations. At the same time, however, it demonstrates the structural limitations of local development. We believe that precisely through the analysis of this unrealized project it becomes possible to most fully evaluate the modernization potential of Kherson at the beginning of the twentieth century and to understand why the city differed significantly from other centers of Southern Ukraine, where tramway systems became reality rather than remaining merely ambitious plans. Such unrealized concepts often reveal structural imbalances, hidden conflicts of interest, resource constraints, and possibly even corruption schemes that under normal circumstances remain outside the focus of researchers.

In the case of Kherson, the contract with V. Bosalini represents a high level of strategic thinking on the part of municipal self-government. The project was drafted in detail, taking into account technical standards, administrative procedures, quality control mechanisms, financial guarantees, and long-term consequences for urban space. In our opinion, according to the totality of these parameters Kherson was not inferior to other southern Ukrainian cities and in some respects even surpassed them in the thoroughness of regulatory planning. However, this document also demonstrates the reverse side of the modernization process: the complexity, bureaucratic scale, and multi-level nature of the governance system, which required stable financial flows, high discipline among executors, and coordinated interaction between municipal authorities and private capital.

We tend to believe that, unlike Odesa and Mykolaiv, where tramway development became part of the broader economic dynamics of port and industrial centers, Kherson remained a city with a less diversified economic base. Its modernization efforts were largely dependent on individual entrepreneurial initiatives, the attitudes of local elites, levels of corruption, and limited competitiveness, and were therefore less protected against financial risks. Consequently, the failure or non-implementation of the Bosalini project should be viewed not as an accidental event but rather as a symptom of a systemic problem: the presence of ambitious plans without a sufficiently strong economic and administrative foundation to support them in the long term.

The analysis of this project also helps explain why the spatial development of Kherson followed a different trajectory than that of neighboring cities. The

absence of a tramway network meant that the city did not acquire a powerful integrative framework that in Mykolaiv and Odesa shaped patterns of settlement, the location of industrial zones, and the formation of transport corridors. In our opinion, for this reason Kherson preserved a more fragmented urban structure, in which peripheral districts remained weakly connected with the city center, while the real estate market developed more slowly.

Thus, the Kherson model of modernization demonstrates that the city stood on the threshold of profound transformations but was unable to cross that threshold, which ultimately determined the specific and unfinished character of the development of its urban space at the beginning of the twentieth century.

4. Conclusions

Based on the results of the conducted research, it is possible to formulate a number of generalizing conclusions that reflect both the specific features of the development of Kherson at the turn of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the broader patterns of urban modernization in Southern Ukraine. First of all, the analysis of the contract between the Kherson City Duma and the Italian entrepreneur made it possible to consider the electric tramway project as a comprehensive model of urban space governance that combined technical, administrative, financial, and social components within a single regulatory system.

We conclude that at the beginning of the twentieth century Kherson possessed sufficient institutional potential to initiate large-scale infrastructure transformations. The City Duma and municipal administration operated according to the principles of active self-government, demonstrating the ability for strategic planning, the attraction of foreign capital, and the adoption of European managerial practices.

The entrepreneur V. Bosalini introduced into the local environment of Southern Ukraine technical innovations and standards of urban organization that were characteristic of Western European cities. At the same time, the unfinished nature of the electric tramway project became an indicator of the structural limitations of Kherson's modernization. Despite the detailed concession terms, regulated procedures, and the presence of administrative ambitions, the city proved unable to provide stable financial and social conditions for the long-term implementation of the project. This significantly distinguished Kherson from neighboring cities of the same province, Mykolaiv and Odesa, where tramway systems became the foundation of a new spatial organization of urban life.

The analysis of the unrealized nature of the project allows us to identify the specific features of the Kherson model of modernization as a transitional one, situated between traditional forms of urban development and modern European standards. The absence of a tramway network led to the preservation of a fragmented urban spatial structure, slower integration of suburban territories, and a less dynamic development of the real estate market, which had long-term consequences for the socio-economic development of the city.

The study of the Kherson electric tramway project as an unrealized modernization initiative makes it possible to better understand the limits and contradictions of urban transformations in Southern Ukraine at the beginning of the twentieth century. It highlights the role of municipal self-government, foreign agents of modernization, and financial and economic factors in shaping urban space, while also identifying the reasons why Kherson remained outside the process of tramway development that defined the future appearance of other major cities in the region.

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Date of initial submission: 09.01.2026

Date of acceptance after peer review: 13.03.2026

Publication date: 07.04.2026