

## Article

# River Beaches in Russian Cities: Examples of Soviet Legacy

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**Abstract:** The diversity of urban heritage is determined by some national peculiarities of the development of cities and towns. In Russia, river beaches are common recreational elements of urban environments. Representative examples of such beaches from two cities, namely Rostov-on-Don and Cherepovets, are examined. This study utilizes both a qualitative approach for argumentation of heritage value and a semi-quantitative evaluation of aesthetic properties. It is argued that the urban river beaches are linked closely to the cities' identities. They were created in the Soviet times when significant attention was paid to healthy lifestyle and rational planning in growing and industrialized urban areas. Two main findings are the potential historical heritage value of the urban river beaches of Russia, including two examples considered in this study, and their significant appeal to the visitors' sense of beauty. Although Rostov-on-Don and Cherepovets represent very different natural and socio-economical environments, their river beaches are important in regard to the representation of the cities' identities and aesthetics. This importance is a bit higher in the case of Rostov-on-Don. It is generally concluded that river beaches in Russian cities constitute potential, country-specific heritage, which seems to be a part of the Soviet legacy. Creating their national catalogue with GIS technologies is desirable.

**Keywords:** aesthetics; soviet heritage; urban planning



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## 1. Introduction

Urban heritage has remained on the agenda of international research for decades. For instance, this kind of heritage is important for sustainable development [1,2], serves as a resource for tourism growth [3], creates new agenda for developing countries [4], and contributes to place identity [5]. Such novel research topics as urban geoheritage have appeared recently [6,7]. A particular research direction focuses on the links between cultural heritage and the recreational resources of cities. Baylan [8] indicated that cultural landscapes provide recreational benefits. According to Hajzeri [9], urban parks can have heritage value. Verschuure-Stuip and Labuhn [10] stressed the importance of architectural heritage from historic city cores for recreation development. Some recreational objects from urban areas can also be the subject of scientific design [11]. Generally, it appears that various urban heritage has recreational value, and recreational objects can also have heritage value. The latter option is less explored, and the related examples need more attention.

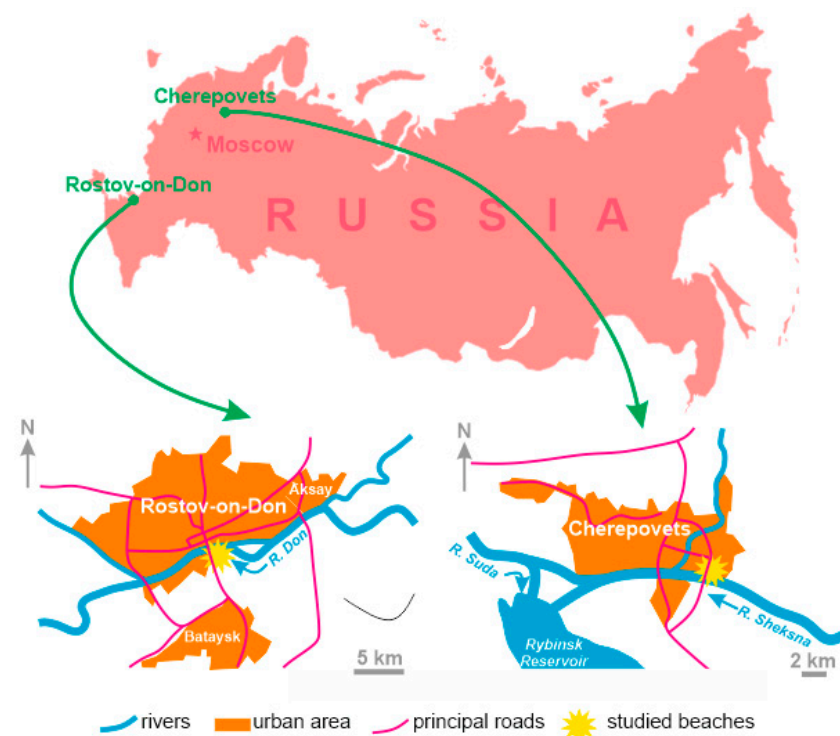
River beaches are rather uncommon in modern cities due to restricted space, inappropriate water quality due to industrial pollution, and high accessibility of sea resorts

and rural recreation spaces. However, these reasons do not mean the absence of public demand for urban river beaches, as evidenced by the success of the Paris-Plage(s) project in the capital of France where artificial beaches are established temporarily on the banks of the Seine River [12]. The other spectacular example is heliotherapy “colonies” created in the 1930s on the banks of the Po River [13]. However, the most representative cases of urban river beaches can be found in cities and towns of Russia where such recreational facilities were actively created since the beginning of the Soviet epoch (i.e., since the 1920s) and remain actively used until nowadays. Unfortunately, these country-specific objects and their potential heritage value have not been addressed by international research. Taking into account the present interest in the diversity of urban heritage (see above), this evident gap in knowledge needs to be filled.

The objective of the present study is an examination of river beaches from Russian cities as potential heritage objects. Two representative examples are chosen, namely the beaches of Rostov-on-Don and Cherepovets. These examples from large, well-developed cities demonstrate what urban beaches look like in the Russian South and the Russian Northwest, respectively. Attention is paid to not only their heritage value but also aesthetic properties. Russia boasts a well-developed system of heritage designation, which allows establishing both natural and cultural (also historical) objects of heritage on the federal, regional, and local (municipal) levels. This system is based on multiple legal acts prescribing the related procedures. However, any formal procedures should be preceded by general, informal proposals and judgments of heritage and its particular kinds. The present study aims at offering such an informal proposal for a new kind of potential heritage, taking into account that such a purely academic analysis forms the basis for further actions. In other words, this paper tends to propose a specific heritage and give its representative examples; this information can be used for further investigations and possible official heritage designation.

## 2. Studied Urban Areas

The present analysis deals with two urban areas in different parts of Russia (Figure 1). These areas differ in both natural and socio-economical conditions. Importantly, both are representative of their regions, namely the Russian South and the Russian Northwest.



**Figure 1.** Geographical location of the study objects.

Rostov-on-Don is a large city in the Russian South founded in 1749. It is situated near the mouth of the Don River, and it serves as the capital of both the Rostov Region and the Southern Federal District. The city stands on a steep right river bank, and its natural setting is characterized by a semi-arid temperate climate (long hot summers, mild winters, and restricted annual rainfall) and steppe (grassland) vegetation. The population is ~1.1 million people, and the entire agglomeration (Rostov-on-Don, Aksay, Bataysk, and other neighboring towns) is home to >2.5 million people. This is an important business, financial, educational, cultural, and transport center, which is known informally as the “southern capital” of Russia. Its distinctive feature is a mix of cultures and traditions. Recreation has always been demanded in this city [14]. The considered urban beach is located on the left bank of the Don River (Figure 1), and it belongs administrative to the Left Bank municipal park constructed together with a football arena in the second half of the 2010s.

Cherepovets, a large city in the Russian Northwest, obtained its official status in 1777, but it has been known since the 14th century. Administratively, this city belongs to the Vologda Region. It is situated near the mouths of the Sheksna and Suda rivers entering the Rybinsk Reservoir—a large artificial lake created due to damming of the Volga River in the 1940s. The city stands on a northern, rather flat bank of the reservoir, and its natural setting is characterized by a temperate climate (cool summers, severe winters, and moderate annual rainfall) and southern taiga (forest) vegetation. The population exceeds 300 thousand people. This is an important industrial, educational, and transport center. Culturally, this city is rather homogeneous. Attempts to organize the space of this city for the purposes of recreation and sustainability have been done since the 19th century [15]. The considered river beach is municipal, and it is located on the right bank of the Sheksna River (Figure 1). More specifically, it lies near the larger recreational object, namely the Makarinskaya urban forest (a kind of birch park), which is a remnant of the 19th-century private estate. The river beach and the urban forest form a single recreational space.

### 3. Methodology

The present study includes two approaches. The first of them is qualitative analysis aimed at the establishment of heritage importance of the river beaches in the considered urban areas. The second approach is a semi-quantitative, object-related analysis of the aesthetic properties of these beaches.

#### 3.1. *Arguing Heritage Importance*

Recognition of heritage, either natural or cultural, can be performed with different sets of criteria [16–20]. The formal approaches depend on official recommendations, legislations, and general experience frameworks, which differ between countries and responsible organizations. The local people’s perceptions are also important. A holistic approach is heritage planning, which focuses not only on particular objects but also on entire landscapes providing contexts for these objects; such landscapes bear both tangible and intangible attributes [21]. Anyway, the most essential seems to be the demonstration of any universal value, which determines the object’s importance to society or, at least, the local community. Apparently, this value also links objects and landscapes.

The qualitative approach used in the present study aims at establishing the links of the urban beaches to the identity of the relevant city. For this purpose, the historical context of their development and functioning is revealed. If the links to the city’s identity are found, potential heritage value can be supposed. Notably, urban heritage is a too broad category, which refers to the occurrence of heritage objects within cities and towns and their relations to the development of the latter. Essentially, these objects can differ substantially being parts of natural, cultural, industrial, and other kinds of heritage. If so, it seems to be important to assign the studied beaches to any particular kind of heritage. Such a perspective matches to a certain degree to the European

Landscape Convention [22], taking into account the experience of its application in such countries as Italy [23] and Spain [24]. In this regard, the river beach is not just a peculiar object, but a part of the larger urban landscape with its definite identity and local people's perceptions.

### 3.2. Evaluating Aesthetics

Aesthetic is an important attribute of heritage, which adds value to objects and facilitates their use for recreational purposes [25–29]. However, the understanding of this attribute is not yet fixed. Following the earlier ideas applied to natural heritage [30], it is reasonable to distinguish aesthetic properties from aesthetic attractiveness. The former are objective, physical properties of objects, whereas the latter are subjective judgments of these objects by visitors depending on their aesthetic preferences, i.e., their personal sense of beauty (the same property with the same characteristics can be judged attractive or distractive by different individuals) [30]. Aesthetic properties can be established with a set of criteria (see below) via careful examination of heritage objects. Aesthetic attractiveness can be established via examining visitors' opinions in the course of special surveys or experiments [31]. Additionally, attractiveness can be expected (predicted) if the common visitors' preferences for beauty are well-documented.

Yet the other aspect of heritage aesthetics can be proposed, namely aesthetic power. Aesthetic attractiveness sheds light on visitors' emotional satisfaction from objects' view. However, it is equally or even more important to realize whether a given object appeals to visitors' sense of beauty, irrespective of positive or negative aesthetic judgments. Apparently, some heritage objects can display more aesthetic properties and are sharper than others. For instance, the object's age, which is among such properties [31] can be unknown in some cases, or the other object can remain outside of man's influence, and, thus, it is impossible to judge its upkeep. Aesthetic power, which can also be termed provisionally as aesthetic appeal, is understood as the entity of objectively established aesthetic properties where the relative intensity of each property is considered. Heritage objects with bigger aesthetic power appeal strongly to visitors' emotions, which can be either positive or negative depending on their personal sense of beauty. In order to evaluate the aesthetic power, it is necessary to register the presence of each common aesthetic property in a given object. These properties have been identified by Kirillova et al. [31] whose classification can be employed for the purposes of this study with minor modifications (Table 1). These properties can appear in two directions depending on the physical parameters of the object, but no direction itself is "good" or "bad" (the only visitors' preferences influence which direction is "better"). Each property of a given object is examined to understand whether it is present at all, and, if yes, whether its direction is clear or unclear. The results of this examination allow scoring all properties of the study object (Table 1). The properties with clear and unclear directions differ by two scores because only the former determines real aesthetic appeal to visitors. The scores of all properties are then summarized to signify aesthetic power and to establish its grade (Table 1).

The river beaches of Rostov-on-Don and Cherepovets have been visited to collect the material (direct observations, photographs, and audio recordings) for subsequent evaluation of their aesthetic power. Particularly, all aesthetic properties have been checked for scoring. The approach characterized above (Table 1) has been applied. The analysis is reasonable to undertake in only summer when the local "swimming season" (usually, June–September) takes place and the beaches are open (visiting them is permitted officially) and, thus, most demanded, for visitors. If river beaches can be understood as urban heritage, the seasonality of the heritage functioning should be taken into account.

**Table 1.** Aesthetic properties of urban river beaches employed for evaluating their aesthetic power (see text for explanations).

Criteria	Directions	Scoring System
Color	Colorful—Dull	0—property is almost absent (undetectable),
Pattern	Clear—Unclear	1—property matters to certain degree (no clear direction),
Physical proportion	Grand—Quaint	3—property determines the object's identity (clear direction)
Visual cues	Abundant—Scarce	EVALUATION TEMPLATES:
Space	Open—Narrow	(A) A given urban beach is unorganized, and it is not prone to waste accumulation => Property "Upkeep" is not suitable => Score 0
Object's age	Modern—Historic	(B) A given urban beach attracts both young and old persons => Property "People's Age" matters, but indefinitely => Score 1
People's age	Young—Old	(C) A given urban beach has just been constructed, and it boasts very modern infrastructure => Property "Novelty" is well-represented => Score 3
Hygienic condition	Clean—Dirty	Grades of aesthetic power: 0–15—small, 16–30—moderate, 31–45—big, 46–60—outstanding
Upkeep	Well-kept—Run-down	
Sound source	Natural—Artificial	
Sound volume	Loud—Quiet	
Integrity	Authentic—Artificial	
Origin	Natural—Man-made	
Flow of visual cues	Cohesive—Out of place	
Variety of visual cues	Diverse—Alike	
Novelty	Novel—Typical	
Complexity	Simplistic—Complex	
Shape	Round—Angular	
Symmetry	Symmetric—Asymmetric	
Uniqueness	Unique—Ordinary	

## 4. Results

### 4.1. General Frame

The considered river beach of Rostov-on-Don (Figure 1) stretches along the Don River, boasts well-developed infrastructure, and offers spectacular views towards the central part of the city (Figure 2). The beach's length is ~300 m, its width is ~50 m, and it can accommodate several hundreds of visitors (the actual number of visitors depends on weather conditions, but the maximum capacity is usually not reached). The beach is flat and sandy (yellowish-white, alluvial, quartz-dominated sand). The quality of water is controlled regularly by the municipal authorities, and the beach can be opened each year only if the water quality matches the requirements.

The history of this beach goes back to the beginning of the 1930s when the Soviet Government paid significant efforts to improvements in the planning and development of urban areas in the Russian South. Particularly, a "green" belt consisting of artificial forests was constructed around Rostov-on-Don, and a lengthy recreational zone was created along the left bank of the river. There, a narrow stripe along the river was cleaned from vegetation, and the beach was created. It was specially designed for short-term recreation (sunbathing, swimming, and picnics) to provide healthy conditions for the population of the growing city (the latter promised to become an important industrial center in those times).

This beach became popular after World War II when the city grew significantly and extended its transport infrastructure. Recreation on this beach has become symbolic to the city. The so-called "Levberdon" (Russian abbreviation of the Left Bank of the Don) equated to the beach and its vicinity has remained among the main and most-known city's attractions until nowadays. A popular song devoted to recreational activities



on this beach appeared at the end of the 1980s, and it is one of the most associated with the common image of Rostov-on-Don. The city's life in the second half of the 20th century remained closely related to the functioning of the beach. In the 2010s, the latter was re-designed, shortened, and joined to the newly created park near the football arena, which hosted several plays of the FIFA World Cup 2018. The view of the beach has become more modern, but also more artificial and less "green". Nonetheless, it remains an important recreational attraction for the city's population. A certain decline in its popularity relative to the pre-1990s can be explained by the increase in people's mobility and the better accessibility of the Black Sea resorts.



**Figure 2.** River beach of Rostov-on-Don: (a,b)—general views, (c)—panoramic view from the beach, (d)—quay near the beach.

The considered river beach of Cherepovets (Figure 1) stretches along the Sheksna River, hosts limited infrastructure, and offers views towards the left bank of the river with the typical passage of the Russian Northwest (Figure 3). The beach's length is ~500 m, its width is ~30 m, and it can accommodate a few hundreds of visitors (the actual number of visitors depends on weather conditions, but it usually does not exceed several dozens of persons). The beach is flat and sandy (yellowish-white, alluvial, quartz-dominated sand). The quality of water is controlled regularly by the municipal authorities, and the beach can be opened each year only if the water quality matches the requirements.



**Figure 3.** River beach of Cherepovets: (a)—general view, (b)—rare infrastructural objects, (c)—view from the beach.

This beach has developed since the mid-20th century. Cherepovets has grown as an industrial city, and providing a healthy environment has been essential for the local workforce and the entire population. Moreover, the city is located in the Russian Northwest, far from sea resorts, and the local climate is rather severe during a significant part of the year. In such conditions, the demand for recreation has remained very high. The river beach has provided opportunities for outdoor recreation, including sunbathing and swimming. It has been popular among the local people for decades. Currently, the construction of a new bridge facilitates the people's attention to the beach. It should also be noted that the latter is spatially connected to the Makarinskaya urban forest, which is not only recreational but also a historical attraction. The beach and the forest form a homogeneous landscape looking like a “piece of nature” in the interior of the industrial city.

As suggested by the characteristics provided above, both river beaches generate meanings, which are directly related to the very identity of the relevant cities. In Rostov-on-Don, the beach symbolizes the “southern” city where recreation is among the priorities of life. In Cherepovets, the beach connects the historical pre-industrial (“provincial”) and industrial meanings. Importantly, both beaches have been deeply integrated into the urban development, and they played important roles in the latter. Moreover, these beaches symbolize transformations of the cities in the present. In Rostov-on-Don, the changes in the beach reflect the modernization of the entire city. In Cherepovets, the beach's “attachment” to the

new bridge reflects the rapid growth and prosperity of the city. These qualitative interpretations allow considering both river beaches as potential urban heritage. This proposition can be argued even better by putting these urban beaches into a broader context. Particularly, it is important to treat them as a country-specific urban heritage.

River beaches in urban areas, especially in or near city centers, are rather unusual on the world's scale. The most notable examples can be found in several cities of northern Italy such as Cremona where such beaches were constructed on the banks of the Po River in the first decades of the 20th century [13,32,33]. In Zagreb (Croatia), there is a beach on the bank of the Sava River [34]. The urban river beaches of a very different kind include artificial and temporal constructions such as the Paris-Plage(s) project [12]. However, the examples of full-scale river beaches in urban areas seem to be few. Of course, there are many urban recreational areas on river banks, but these are not large beaches functioning like sea beaches in resort areas. Interestingly, many Russian cities and towns boast well-developed river beaches (these exist almost everywhere in the country). The beach of Rostov-on-Don is a very representative example of how these objects look in a "southern" city with favorable climatic conditions (very hot, sunny, and long summers), and the beach of Cherepovets is an example of how these objects can look like in a "northern", industrial city with generally unfavorable climatic conditions (relatively cool, cloudy, and rather short summers).

The availability of river beaches in cities and towns has become possible due to the initiatives of the Soviet Government from the 1920–1930s and before the 1990s, when attention was paid to maintaining a healthy lifestyle and rational planning in urban areas where recreational zones were prescribed to be extensive. There was also very active propaganda of this healthy lifestyle (the related historical explanations were provided, particularly, by Lubysheva et al. [35] and Sakharov and Sakharova [36]), which stimulated significant demand for beaches. Importantly, many Russian cities and towns stand on large rivers and are far from sea resorts, which made river banks ideal places for recreational development. Decades of the noted initiatives made river beaches very common elements of urban environments, and visiting them became a custom for the urban population. Urban river beaches remain very important attractions to contemporary Russians, and they symbolize not only health and cleanness, but also the state care of the people, i.e., a kind of social responsibility. This uniqueness of the urban river beach created in the ex-USSR contributes to the potential heritage value of the considered beaches, especially taking into account their representativeness (see above). In other words, the river beaches from Rostov-on-Don and Cherepovets seem to be country-specific urban objects.

Urban heritage is a too vast category, and, thus, more specific kinds of heritage should be specified for the urban river beaches. Although the majority of beaches are essentially natural objects, it is unreasonable to attribute them to natural heritage because the original natural environments are strongly modified and also the common meanings of these objects are recreational, i.e., more related to culture than nature. An alternative solution would be to assign them to cultural heritage. Indeed, the beaches associate with the lifestyle-related identity of the cities (especially in Rostov-on-Don). However, their cultural meanings are rather common and do not differ substantially from those of many other recreational zones like parks. The most appropriate is to relate them to the historical heritage. As shown above, the beaches of Rostov-on-Don and Cherepovets reflect the urban development in the 20th century and, particularly, the initiatives of the Soviet Government aimed at a healthy lifestyle and rational planning to match the needs of the idealized Soviet people (healthy, enthusiastic, patriotic, prosperous, and future-oriented). A specific category of historical heritage is Soviet heritage, which is sometimes linked to recreational objects [37,38]. This heritage is understood as the entity of objects and traditions, which represent specific features of the USSR's life from 1917–1991. These can include not only architecture and monuments but also food, festivals, industrial objects, etc., which appeared in the noted time interval and reflect the identity of the Soviet society. Apparently, river beaches, which are common in Russian cities, effectively represent attitudes, initiatives, and life of the Soviet people, and, thus, they are characteristic elements of the Soviet heritage.



The considered beaches contribute to the sustainability of the cities. They provide recreational spaces for maintaining people's health. Their functioning requires regular environmental monitoring and raises the question of water quality. If so, their presence facilitates environmental management of the urban areas. These beaches also serve as "anchors" allowing to retain naturally looking (also "green") zones in the cities' interiors. Historically, both beaches were related to "green" zones around the cities (see above). Although these river beaches are situated in rather marginal parts of the cities (Figure 1), their accessibility is very perfect. In Rostov-on-Don, one can easily reach the beach via a tall bridge connecting the right and left banks of the Don River and leading directly to the city's center). In Cherepovets, the beach is accessible from the main city's roads. In addition, in both cases, the beaches are joined to the urban parks with pedestrian facilities (Figures 2 and 3). Indeed, these characteristics increase the importance of these urban river beaches.

#### 4.2. Aesthetic Properties

Of 20 analyzed aesthetic properties, 19 are found on the beach of Rostov-on-Don, and 18 are found on the beach of Cherepovets (Table 2). However, many properties are represented weakly, i.e., with unclear direction. Therefore, these are scored low. The beach of Rostov-on-Don boasts 11 aesthetic properties with clear direction, and the beach of Cherepovets possesses 10 properties (Table 2). Two of them, namely color and origin, can be taken as examples for demonstration of the interpretation logic. Color is a fundamental aesthetic property [31], which appeals to people's emotions [39]. Both beaches exhibit a diversity of color (Table 2): yellowish-white sand, blue river, blue sky, green trees, and white constructions. Apparently, the contrast of colors is higher in Cherepovets (Figure 3) than in Rostov-on-Don (Figure 2). The other notable aesthetic property is origin [31]. The beach of Rostov-on-Don is dominated by man-made constructions, which are visible on the beach itself and on the panoramic views (Figure 2). Importantly, the significant transformation of the beach in the 2010s made it look very artificial. In contrast, the beach of Cherepovets looks natural (like an ordinary river bank comfortable for relaxing and swimming), and the presence of man-made objects is minimal (Figure 3). The new bridge only underlines the natural beauty of the local landscape. This is an example of when one property can differ strikingly between the beaches (Table 2). Indeed, it would be wrong to say which direction of this property is better because different visitors may have different opinions.

**Table 2.** Aesthetic power of the analyzed urban river beaches (see Table 1 for meaning of scores).

Properties	Rostov-on-Don		Cherepovets	
	Direction *	Score	Direction *	Score
Color	Colorful	3	Colorful	3
Pattern		1	Clear	3
Physical proportion		1		1
Visual cues	Abundant	3		1
Space		1	Open	3
Object's age	Modern	3		0
People's age		1		1
Hygienic condition	Clean	3		1
Upkeep		1		1

Table 2. *Cont.*

Properties	Rostov-on-Don		Cherepovets	
	Direction *	Score	Direction *	Score
Sound source		1		1
Sound volume		1		1
Integrity	Authentic	3	Authentic	3
Origin	Man-made	3	Natural	3
Flow of visual cues		1	Cohesive	3
Variety of visual cues	Diverse	3	Diverse	3
Novelty	Novel	3	Typical	3
Complexity	Complex	3	Simplistic	3
Shape	Angular	3		1
Symmetry		0		0
Uniqueness	Unique	3	Ordinary	3
Total scores/grade		41/big		38/big

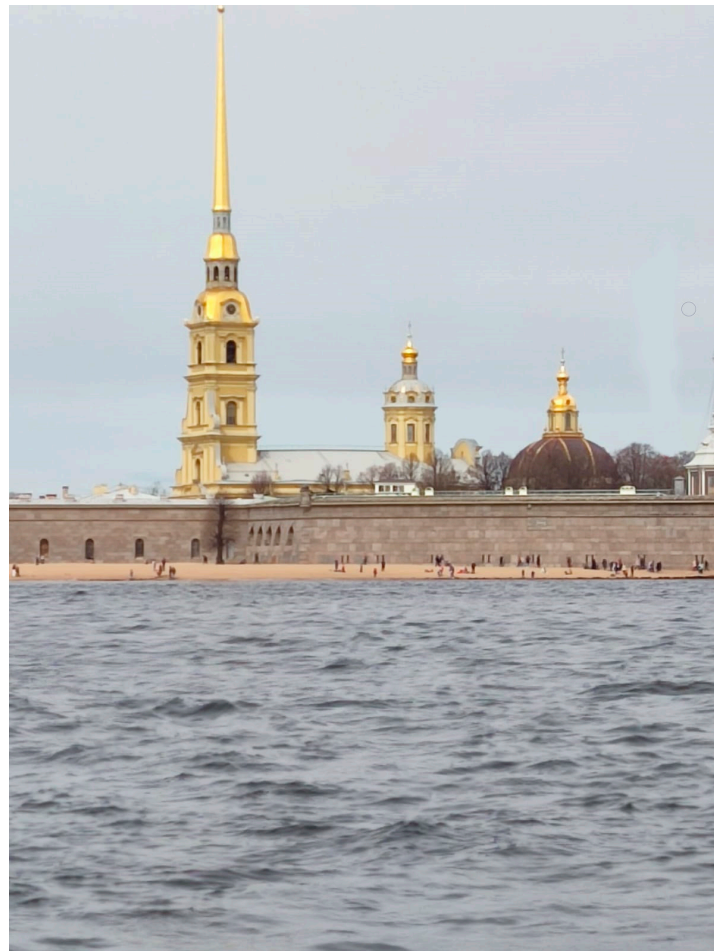
Note: \* direction can be established in only those cases when a property determines the object's identity.

The implementation of the proposed approach allows semi-quantitative evaluation of the aesthetic power of the beaches. It is a bit bigger in the case of Rostov-on-Don. Nonetheless, both beaches belong to the grade of big power (Table 2); this grade is established by the total scores according to the criteria specified in Table 1. Indeed, these objects appeal strongly to their visitors, which finding contributes to their heritage value. Importantly, the big aesthetic power of the urban river beaches representing very different Russian regions implies that this peculiar Soviet heritage may be valuable aesthetically everywhere. Of course, the judgments of visitors may differ, but it is notable this potential heritage appeals to their emotions not only in regard to recreational intentions or the Soviet Past nostalgia but also aesthetically. Hypothetically, the river beaches also contribute to the aesthetic diversity of urban environments.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Recognizing the analyzed urban river beaches as potential, country-specific heritage poses questions about their management. On the one hand, these objects may need official status as heritage objects to protect them from destruction/modification threats due to the changing views of city planning. On the other hand, such a status would challenge their maintenance and development, which are essential to let them function as important recreational attractions. Notably, it is this functioning that links them to the cities' identity. In-depth modification of urban river beaches would lead to changes in their meanings to the local population. Similar dilemmas are known from the experience of beach cleaning, where ecological, recreational, and cultural interests intersect [40].

Apparently, one suitable solution is the adoption of some special recommendations of the municipal administrations responsible for these objects to allow minimal modifications (except for regular improvement of recreational infrastructure, certain modernization, and hygienic maintenance). These recommendations should focus, particularly, on long-term plans for city development. Comparable projects aimed at effective urban planning and specific heritage conservation and development can be taken into account [41–45]. Sustainable development of beaches requires attention to their environmental state because these are partly natural objects [40]. The river beaches of Rostov-on-Don and Cherepovets are naturally shaped so (Figure 3 and Figure 4) that their environmental management does not require any serious modification. There is only a need for the regular collection of litter left by visitors and occasional woody debris.



**Figure 4.** Urban beach of Sankt-Petersburg—a perspective object for further investigations.

The other solution is the active promotion of these beaches in mass media emphasizing their Soviet heritage essence and aesthetic properties. This information can be included in various information sources offered to tourists and locals online and offline. A good example can be found in Rostov-on-Don where the official web page of the park (<http://xn----7sbedocai1acm4aihqi4q.xn--p1ai/>, accessed on 15 June 2022) supplies enough information about the beach, its history, and its special role in the city's life in the past and the present. In other words, it is suggested to heritagize these urban river beaches via marketing tools. These objects can be very suitable to improve images and international tourist attractiveness of the cities. Indeed, the information should be distributed in both Russian and other languages because foreign tourists can be very interested in urban river beaches as country-specific heritage. Moreover, indeed, significant efforts are necessary to maintain the already existing links of these beaches to the city identifies. The only approach to achieve this task is to stimulate their recreational use, i.e., to follow the traditions established in the Soviet times.

The present analysis highlights the uniqueness of urban river beaches in Russia. Apparently, they are linked to different natural and cultural contexts, and their heritage interpretations may also differ. For instance, a beach in Sankt-Petersburg (Figure 4) differs essentially from two considered beaches (it requires special investigations, which are out of the scope of the present study) because it is linked spatially to the pre-Soviet urban heritage. Additionally, consideration of two representative examples in the present study indicates that the aesthetic properties of urban river beaches are not homogeneous in the country.

Conclusively, the present study puts river beaches from Russian cities into the heritage frame. These objects are linked to the cities' identity, and they can be judged as a potential, country-specific heritage. The latter associates with the Soviet heritage, i.e., the legacy

of the Soviet times. The studied urban river beaches exhibit various aesthetic properties, and, thus, they appeal to the people's sense of beauty. The beach of Rostov-on-Don is linked slightly stronger to the city's identity, and it boasts a slightly bigger aesthetic power than the beach of Cherepovets. Both analyzed beaches are representative examples of this category of urban objects, and their potential heritage value seems to be high. Indeed, they need management balancing conservation and modernization, as well as active promotion.

The perspectives for further studies are linked to more extensive investigations of urban river beaches in Russia. Development of their classification taking into account heritage- and aesthetic-linked criteria seems to be very urgent. GIS technologies can be very suitable to create a national catalog of urban river beaches, which would facilitate their management. Special attention should be paid to the examination of the history of the creation of such beaches and the present demand for these recreational facilities. Indeed, the necessity and effectiveness of bottom-up approaches in the recognition and maintenance of this heritage should be characterized by special sociological surveys. The local people's opinion on whether they judge urban river beaches as heritage would be important to take into account. Finally, it is important to analyze these objects outside Russia. Besides the Italian experience [13,32,33], it cannot be excluded that examples can be found in some countries, including Africa and Asia.

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