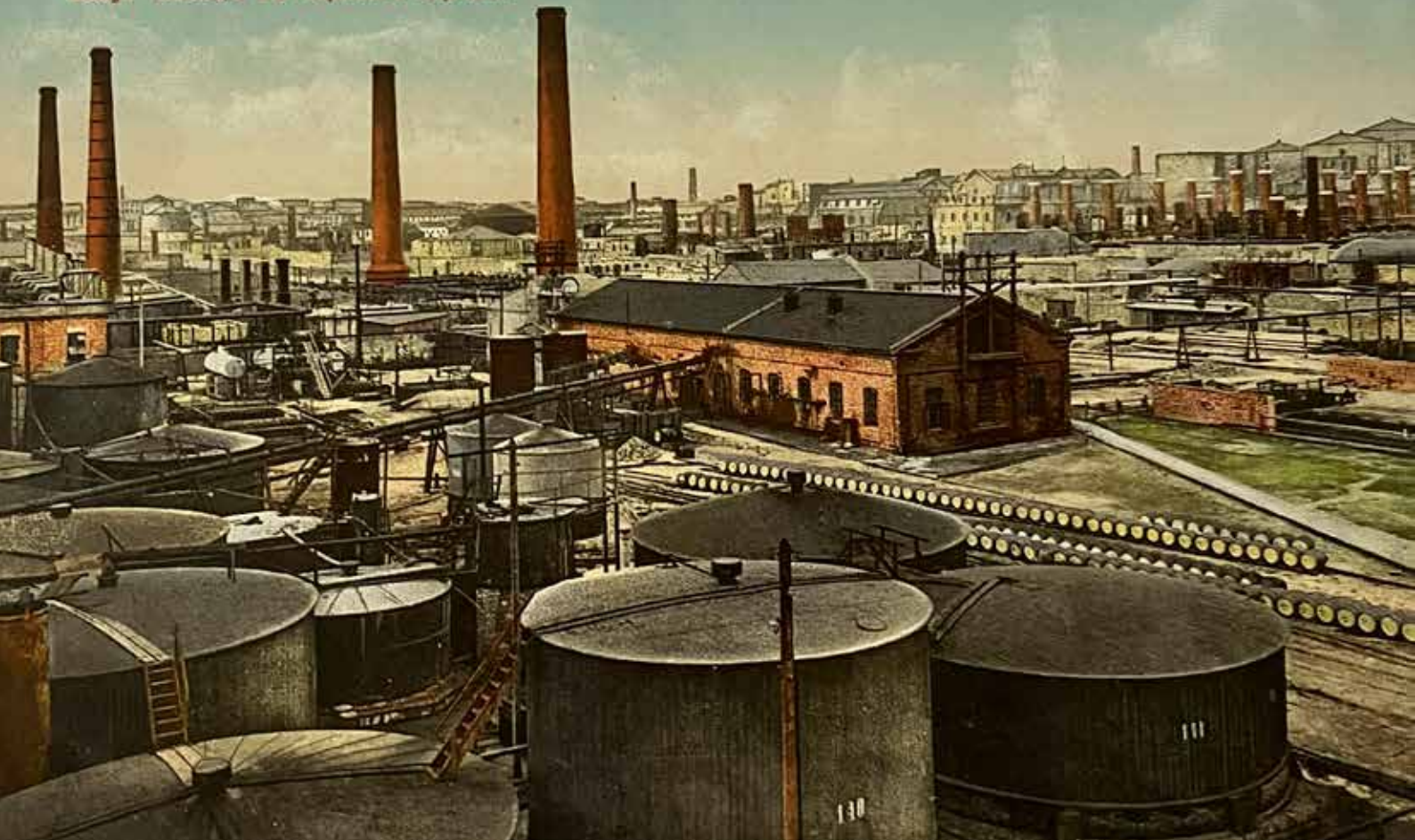


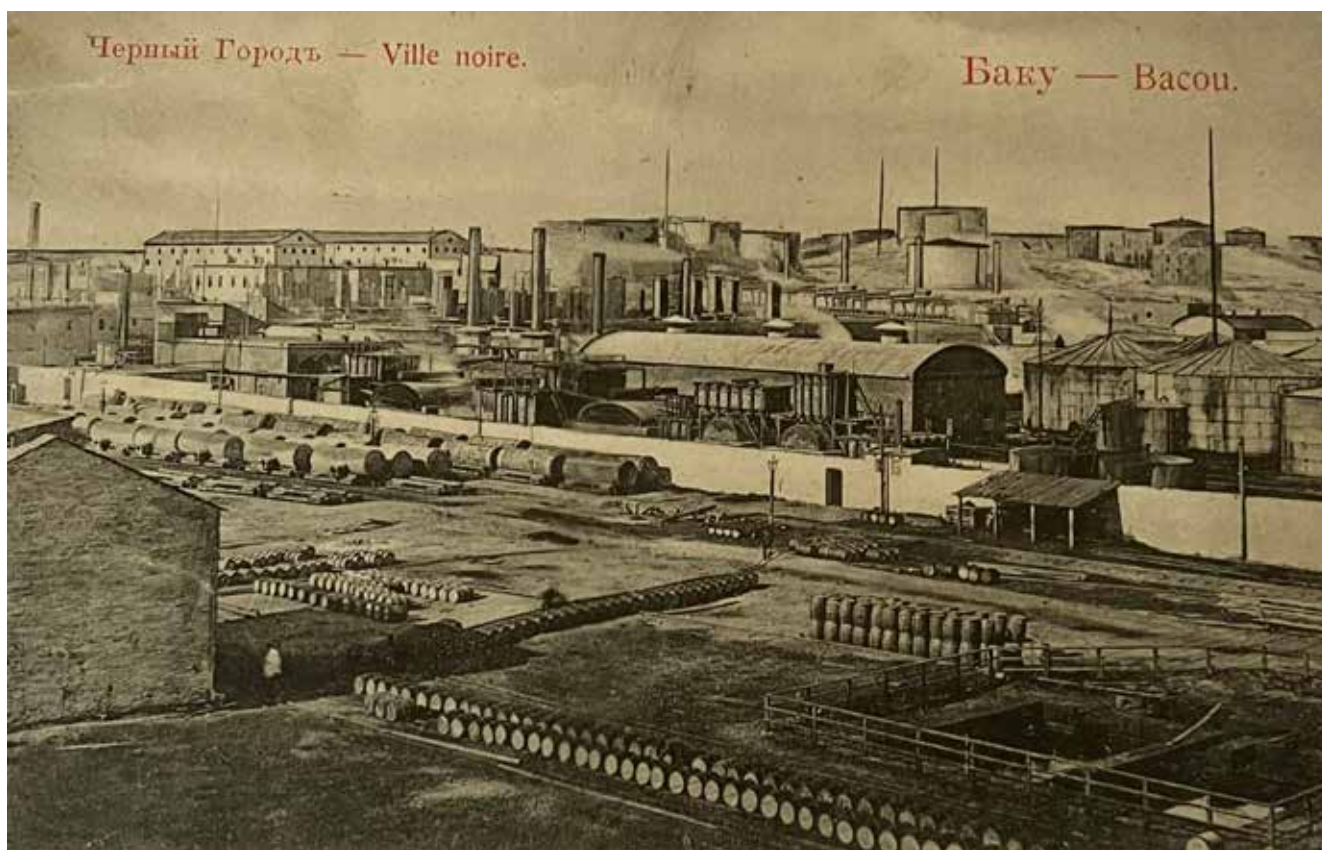
An example of human-centered urban development: **FROM “BLACK CITY” TO “WHITE CITY”**

In 2026, Baku will be hosting the World Urban Forum (WUF13). This forum is a prestigious international platform bringing together experts in urban planning, urban development, and sustainable cities. The forum will provide participants with the opportunity to discuss innovative urban projects, cutting-edge technologies, and best practices in the area of urban development. IRS-Heritage is launching a series of articles in a new section called new “Urban Studies”, dedicated to reviewing Azerbaijan’s experience in urban development across various historical periods.

Editorial team

Баку. Заводъ въ черномъ городѣ.



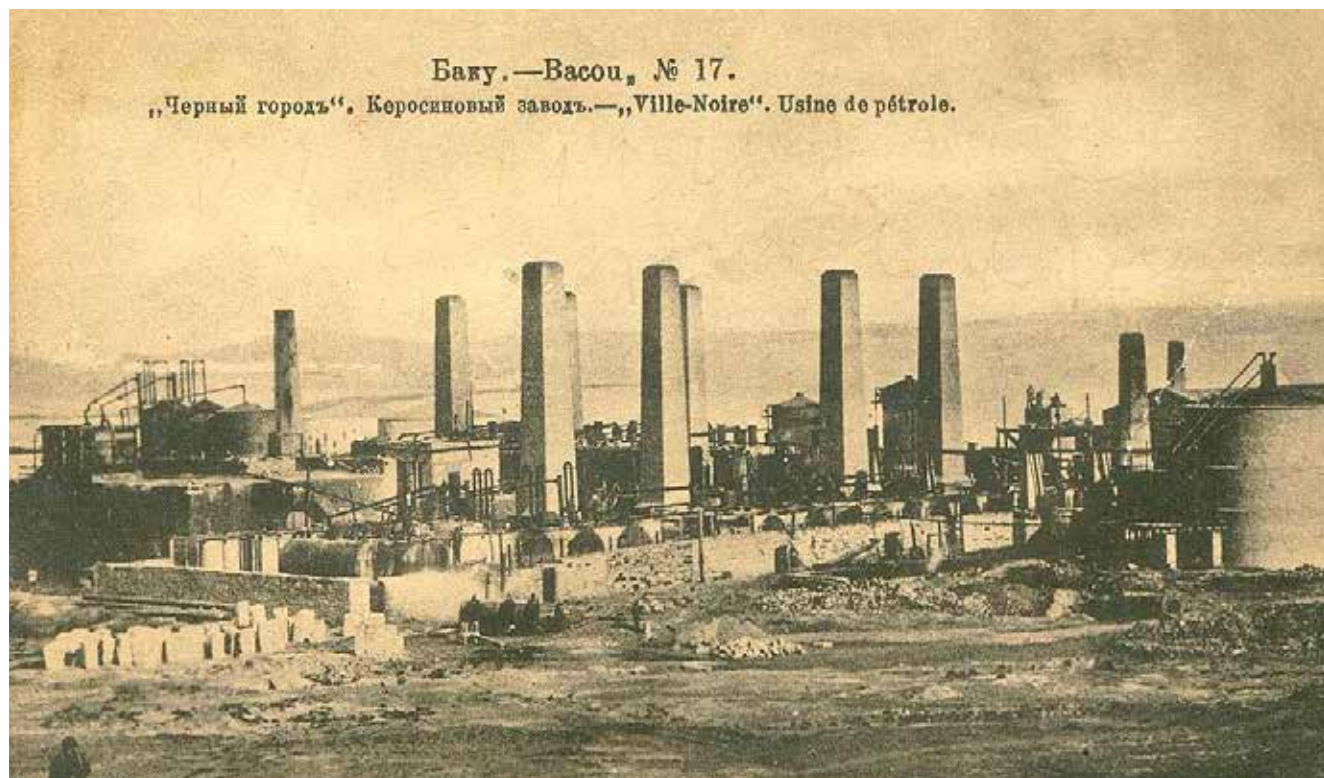


Azerbaijan's successful urban development efforts have received acclaim from the international community, leading to the decision to host the 13th session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13) in Baku in 2026. Considered a major global event, WUF13 is guided by the philosophy of human-centered urban development. WUF13 will be an attempt to present at the global level the principles of social justice, inclusiveness and public participation. The main theme of WUF13 is "Housing for All: Safe and Sustainable Cities and Communities". This is very much in line with Azerbaijan's social development strategy. WUF13 highlights not only infrastructural and technological innovations but also a human-centered urban development philosophy. Azerbaijan is implementing a unique model in this respect: transforming the industrial estate of Baku known as the "Black City" into a human-centered "White City".

In 1837, the first oil refinery was built in Baku, and it was one of the first in the Russian Empire. As early as 1848, the world's first well drilled using the percussion method and wooden rods yielded oil in the Baku suburb of Bibi-Heybat. In 1863, the world-renowned chemist D. I. Mendeleev arrived at the Baku Oil Refinery. Working as a consultant, he developed designs for continuous oil

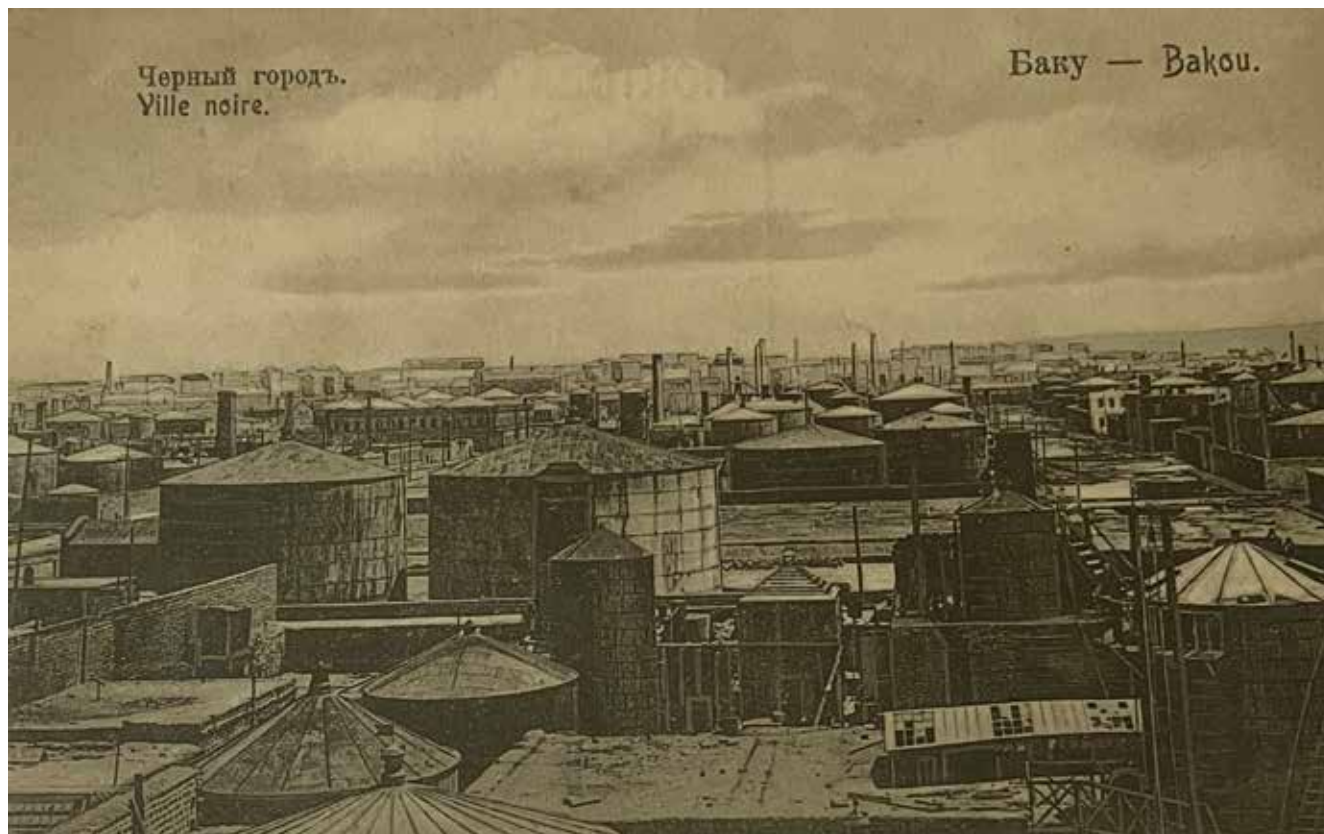
distillation, oil tanks, oil tankers, and oil pipelines. After the Tsarist authorities authorized the sale of oil fields to private individuals in 1873, the world's largest companies flocked to Baku, and it wasn't long before a total of 80 oil refineries were built right within residential areas. Faced with serious public protests, in 1870 the city administration raised the issue of allocating land east of the city for the construction of refineries. Beginning in 1876, 147 factories located amidst residential areas were knocked down and a new industrial district emerged more than 2 kilometers from the city. In 1878, the first oil pipeline in the Russian Empire was built, linking the oil fields in the village of Balakhani to the refineries of the new industrial district. In 1897, construction began on the world's largest main pipeline, the Baku-Batumi pipeline. It was 835 kilometers in length and had a capacity of 1 million tons per year. The pipelines, oil tanks, and cisterns severely polluted the soil.

By 1880, the new area already boasted an impressive 118 enterprises. Oil refineries were built right up to the shoreline, along with piers for loading oil products onto ships. In 1901, oil production in the Russian Empire reached 11.6 million tons (which accounted for 51.6 percent of global production), with Baku accounting for 95 percent of this figure. The first gas drilling rig began



operating in the suburban village of Surakhani. The successful drilling attracted large companies and Surakhani district gained fame as a major gas field.

At the time, the enterprises had no treatment facilities, and the entire area was polluted with oil and oil waste. One visitor to the area wrote in 1890, "Everything



here is black – the walls, the earth, the air, and the sky. You smell the oil, inhale the fumes, and the pungent odor is suffocating. You walk amid clouds of smoke obscuring the sky.” In 1905, a massive fire broke out in the Baku oil fields, the first in world history. A total of 1,996 oil wells were completely destroyed. The black smoke from the fires brought Baku, a city of over 150,000 people at the time, to the brink of environmental disaster. Gradually, the area became known as the “Black City”. This situation remained unchanged throughout the Soviet Union (1922-1991). In 1941, the Baku district produced 23.5 million tons of oil (or 75 percent of all oil production in the USSR) – a record figure in the entire history of oil production in Azerbaijan. Oil refining at the refineries in the “Black City” continued without any regard for environmental standards, which had catastrophic consequences for the area.

In independent Azerbaijan, after addressing the most pressing political and socioeconomic issues, the issue of improving the capital’s environmental and social conditions arose. As a result, a comprehensive approach was adopted, resulting in the development of the “White City” project. This is one of the largest urban development projects implemented within the framework of the “Comprehensive Action Plan for Improving the Environmental Situation in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2006-2010”, which was approved by a presidential decree. The project envisions the rehabilitation and development of the eastern part of the city

covering 1,650 hectares and known as the “Black City”, and the creation of 10 multi-functional urban districts, each providing residents with the best conditions for living, working, rest, and entertainment. On December 24, 2011, a groundbreaking ceremony for the White City (Baku White City) took place with the participation of President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva. For the first time in the history of Azerbaijan, factories have begun to be relocated outside the city. On December 24, 2016, the first “White City” neighborhood consisting of French-style residential buildings and dubbed as a “Green Island” was commissioned. The construction of other residential and service facilities, parks and squares accelerated.

On November 11-22, 2024, Baku hosted the 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) with tremendous success. It is quite symbolic that the headquarters of the COP29 organizing committee was located in the White City office building, which was the first in Azerbaijan to receive a green certificate for compliance with the international BREEAM building environmental performance standard.

Therefore, the White City project, the implementation of which continues to this day, is particularly significant in terms of demonstrating to a global audience the inclusive and sustainable urban development model established by Azerbaijan. This model is in many ways consistent with the principles defined in the UN “New Urban Agenda”. 🌟









